

川上 稔
イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESIS シリーズ 境界線上の ホライゾン

きみとあさままで

III
下



特-6

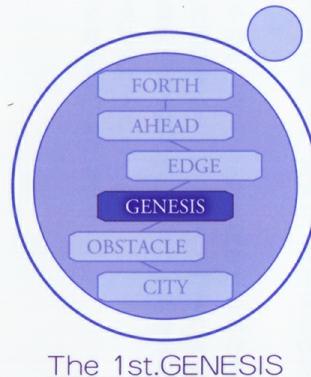


**GENESISシリーズ 境界線上のホライゾン
きみとあさまで III<下>**

川上 稔

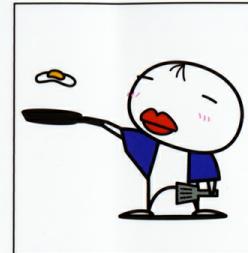
特典文庫

BCXA
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The 1st.GENESIS

NOT FOR SALE



かわかみ みのる
川上 稔

1975年1月3日生まれ。東京出身。特典小説のページ数がついに272ページに! あまりのボリュームアップに、急遽BDの袋とスペーサーを作り直すことになったとか……。

【特典文庫】

GENESISシリーズ境界線上のホライゾン
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GENESISシリーズ
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イラスト:さとやす(TENKY)

山形生まれの栎木育ち「ロールケーキはしつとりおいしい。フルーツぎっしり入ってたら負ける気しない」カロリーも負けないスよ。

© 川上稔／アスキー・メディアワークス／境界線上のホライゾン製作委員会

カバー／旭印刷

『見咎めの部屋で』

ミツツダイラは、浅間の部屋に行つたとき、一つ樂しみにしている事がある。

料理だ。

菓子や食事、飲み物類も、主張の強いものはなく、上品。

高級品を使つているのかと思えば、食材は町に皆で出た時に買つてたりする。

……我が王が洋食スキルですけど、智は和食スキルですわね！……。

青雷亭本舗と浅間神社を往復していくれば、かなり充実した食生活が送れるのではないだろうか。本舗は不定期で、浅間神社に入り浸る訳にもいかないので、ローテーションが完全に組め

ないのが惜しいが、だからこそいいのかもしない、とも思う。

今も、禊祓の泉の後で出てくる朝食は、冷えた身体を温めるもの。

……茶碗蒸しに白米に鮒の生姜味噌煮に、練り物のチーズ焼きに……。

「あ、目玉焼きはミト専用です。お肉の分厚いのが無かつたもので。玉水と被りますけど、醤油で熱い内にどうぞ」

「いえ、充分ですよ」

ミツツダイラも調理はするが、自分用という感覚が強いし、やや派手気味になる。

……というか、仏蘭西料理って、結構派手なんですよねー……。

元々がガリアの土地の郷土料理だ。山鳥の丸焼きや乾燥肉のワイン焼きなど濃いめが多い。

「本当に……、智はいいお嫁さんになりますわね……」

「いやいや」と応対を誤魔化す彼女とこちらの正面、喜美が自分の胸を両手で叩いて「カマーン！」とやっているが、あまり気にしないでおく。

だが、茶を淹れて貰つて、食事を始めると、香辛料に頼らない味付けは有り難い。

「ほら」

喜美が言う。

「浅間と結婚すると幸せな食生活が送れるわよ？」

「あの、喜美？ 私は主食が肉ですか？」

「言った先、じゃあ、と喜美が目を細めた。彼女は一度唇を舐め、

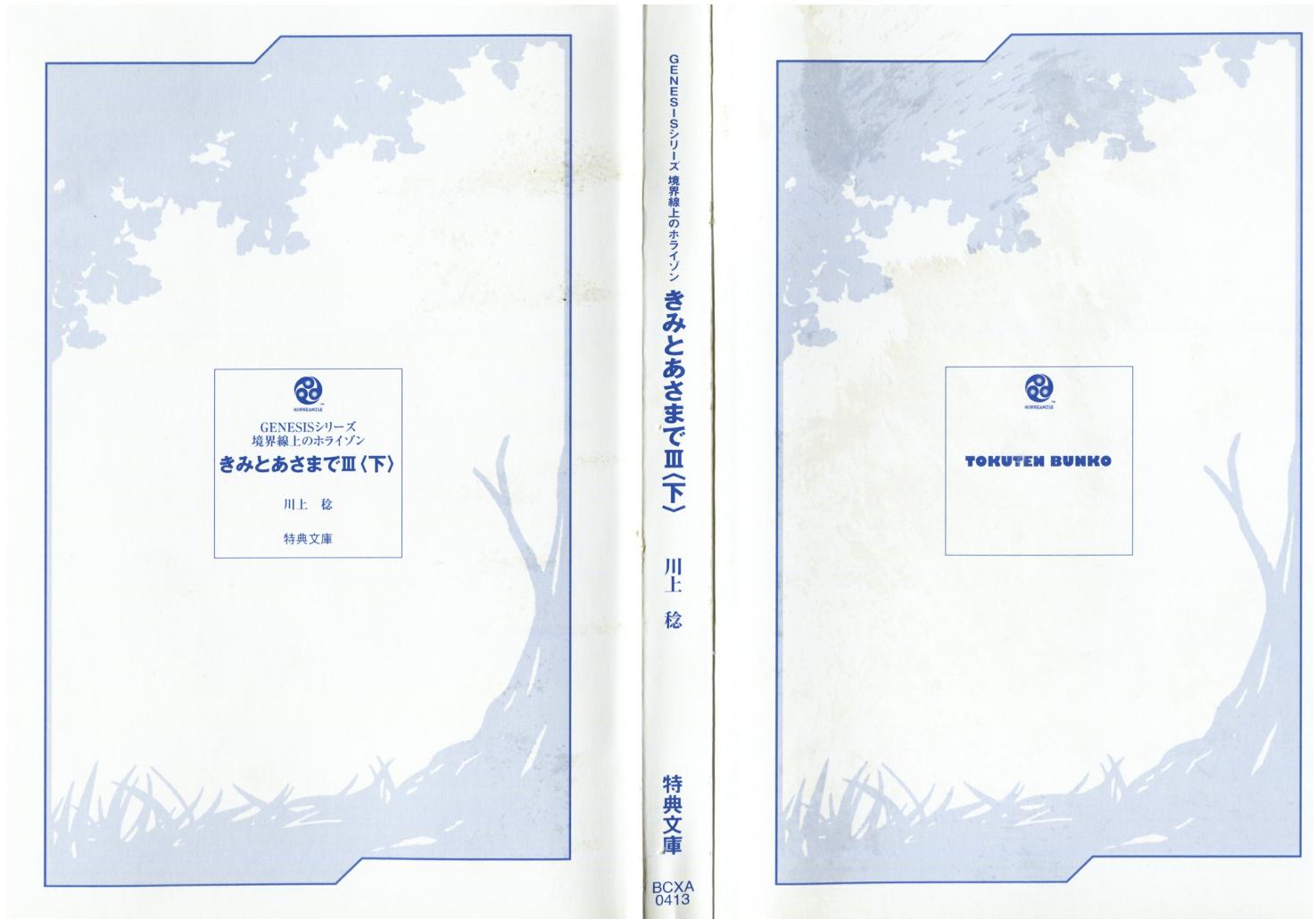
「うちによれば愚弟が肉料理出すから、バランスとれてベストじゃない？」

「……ええと、喜美？ それって私とミトが喜美のとこにいかないとバランスが成り立たない計算になるんですけど……」

「喜美が箸をきちんと置いた。彼女は、両手を合わせてこちらを拝むと、

「バランス……！」

おもむろに浅間とこちらの胸を揉んだので、二人で張り手を叩き込むことにする。



Inside Story

In the Room of Fault Finding

There was one thing Mitotsudaira always looked forward to when visiting Asama's room: the food.

There was no emphasis on snacks, meals, or drinks; it was all high quality.

She had assumed it was made from the finest ingredients, but Asama would buy the same things as everyone else.

...My king is skilled with Western food, but Tomo is skilled with Far Eastern food...

She felt like she could have a wonderfully fulfilling culinary life if she simply alternated between the Main Blue Thunder and the Asama Shrine. She could only visit the Main Blue Thunder occasionally and she could not stay at the Asama Shrine all the time, so she could not set up a perfect rotation. Then again, she felt like the rarity might have been what made it so good.

The breakfast she ate after bathing in the purification spring was made to warm her chilled body.

...Chawanmushi, white rice, mackerel with ginger, and fish paste grilled with cheese.

"Oh, the fried eggs are for Mito. We didn't have any thick cuts of meat, you see. We already have sake, but be sure to eat them with soy sauce while they're hot."

"Thank you. This is more than enough."

Mitotsudaira cooked too, but since she tended to make things the way she liked them, it all tended to be a bit strong.

...In fact, French cooking as a whole is fairly strong...

It had originally been the food of the Gaul region. That meant roasting mountain birds whole and cooking dried meat in wine, so it was usually strong.

"Tomo...you really will make a good wife someday..."

"Oh, stop with that," deflected Asama, but Kimi slapped her own chest with both hands in a "bring it on!" gesture. Mitotsudaira chose to ignore her.

However, after getting some tea and starting to eat, Mitotsudaira was grateful for the flavoring that did not rely on spices.

"See?" said Kimi. "If you marry Asama, you can live a happy culinary life."

"Um, Kimi? I primarily eat meat."

"Then." Kimi narrowed her eyes and licked her lips. "Why not come to our place where my foolish brother can feed you meat? Wouldn't that balance things out nicely?"

"...Uh, Kimi? Wouldn't both Mito and I need to go to your place for that balance to work?"

Hearing that, Kimi set down her chopsticks and brought her hands together as if begging them.

"Balance...!"

She blatantly groped their breasts, so the two of them slapped her.

Title Page

思った以上に流れは速くて
やると決めても渡し船
どう漕ぐべきかと思案の現場にようこと—



きみとあさまで

第五章『集積場の追い立て者達』	…P5	第十章『再立ち処の考え方娘』	…P149
第六章『開放面の来客』	…P39	第十一章『検分場の来訪者』	…P185
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III
下

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)
デザイン: 渡邊宏一(2725 Inc.)

Welcome to a place of thought

*Where the current is faster than you expected And you must decide how to
row the ferry even after making your decision*

Kimitoasamade

Chapter 5: Evictors in a Place of Accumulation – P5

Chapter 6: Visitor on the Open Surface – P39

Chapter 7: Reporter in an Official Place – P61

Chapter 8: Winged Ones Standing Up – P79

Chapter 9: Player at the Shrine – P109

Chapter 10: Thinking Girl Standing Up Once More – P149

Chapter 11: Visitor at an Inspection Point – P185

Chapter 12: Responders of the Twin Walls – P207

Final Chapter: Those who Look Up at the Normal World – P255

III

B

Kawakami Minoru

Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)

Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)

Characters

character

● 武藏



あさまとも
浅間・智

武藏アリアダスト教導院二年。浅間神社の一人娘で中位巫女。弓の射撃を得手とする。地脈の整調も得手とする。クラス内オパイカースト最上位。全裸と馬鹿姉の幼馴染み。



あおいきみ
葵・喜美

武藏アリアダスト教導院二年。浅間の幼馴染みで愚弟の姉。大椿系の奏者で、ダンスとエロ関係の術式が充実。どちらかというと賢姉。



ねいとみつづだいら
ネイト・ミツヅダイラ

武藏アリアダスト教導院二年。水戸松平の暫定襲名者であり半人猿で六護式仏蘭西出身で武藏内騎士連盟第一等でオパイカースト低めで“ですの”語尾でチョーカー好きの肉好きで大体被害者。馬鹿の事を王としている。



あでるべるふえつ
アデーレ・バルフェット

武藏アリアダスト教導院二年。眼鏡。クラス内オパイカースト最下位。最下位。六護式仏蘭西系の従士。脚力があり、突撃性に優れるが貧乏バト人生。犬好き。



むかいすず
向井・鈴

武藏アリアダスト教導院二年。盲目の少女。クラス内における外道行為のトップパー。たまにアクセル。



まるがナルゼ
マルガ・ナルゼ

武藏アリアダスト教導院二年。黒くて白くて無い方。匪堕天六枚翼。同人作家。結構辛辣。ナイトとは恋人関係。



まるごとナイト
マルゴット・ナイト

武藏アリアダスト教導院二年。金色で黒くてある方。墜天六枚翼。およおよまあまああはははは。ナルゼとは恋人関係。



P-O1s
P-O1s

一般民。というか自動人形。この春に三河から乗り込んできただしい。記憶が無くて青雷亭に拾わされて店員やってます。セメント。



なおまさ
直政

武藏アリアダスト教導院二年。機関部で班長したりの片腕義腕の姉御。



ほんだまさすみ
本多・正純

三河から転入してきた男装少女。もう一回言う。男装少女。断層少女とか言わない。ギャグがよく冷える。



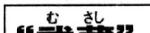
とりいもとただ
鳥居・元忠

武藏の47年度生徒会長兼総長。大椿系の上位巫女。よく笑って他人を巻き込んだり突き落とす。



おおすかやすたか
大須賀・康高

武藏の47年度副長。体格のいいのんびり系。ラブソングとか作詞するよ！



むさし
“武蔵”

僕らの武藏総艦長自動人形。辛辣モードがたまりません。——以上。



おくたま
“奥多摩”

奥多摩の艦長。仕事を“武蔵”がやっちゃう事が多いので、微妙に手持ち無沙汰。たまにボディを使い分けたり。



おもてなさん
一般生徒の方々

今回頑張らない。



あおいトリ
葵・トリ

この頃から既に全裸。

character

• Musashi

- Asama Tomo: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. The only daughter of the Asama Shrine and a mid-level shrine maiden. Specializes in archery and in tuning ley lines. Stands at the top of the class's boob caste system. Childhood friends with the nudist and his stupid sister.
- Aoi Kimi: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Asama's childhood friend and her foolish brother's older sister. An Ootsubaki-style musician with plenty of dancing and sexuality spells. More considerate than anything.
- Nate Mitotsudaira: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Provisional inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name, a half-werewolf, from Hexagone Française, rank 1 member of Musashi's knight's league, low on the boob caste system, speaks in a somewhat noble fashion, likes chokers, likes meat, and generally the victim. Calls the idiot her king.
- Adele Balfette: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Glasses. Lowest on the class's boob caste system. Yes, lowest. An Hexagone Française style of vassal. Has leg strength and can perform an excellent assault, but lives a poor part-timer's life. Loves dogs.
- Mukai Suzu: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Blind girl. Stopper for the horrible actions of the class. Sometimes accelerates them instead.
- Malga Naruze: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Black and white and has nothing. Six-winged fallen angel. Doujin author. Fairly bitter. In a relationship with Naito.
- Margot Naito: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Gold and black and has plenty. Six-winged descended angel. Oh, dear. Oh, my. Ah ha ha ha ha. In a relationship with Naruze.
- P-01s: A normal citizen. Or rather, an automaton. Apparently boarded the Musashi at Mikawa this spring. Has no memories, was taken in by the Blue Thunder, and works there. Cement-like.
- Naomasa: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Barely appears so there might be no point in putting her here. Works as a team leader in the engine division and has one false arm.
- Honda Masazumi: Crossdressing girl who transferred in from Mikawa. Let

me say that again: crossdressing girl. No, that doesn't mean she wears a cross. Her gags get icy reactions.

- Torii Mototada: Musashi's '47 Student Council President and Chancellor. An upper level Ootsubaki-style shrine maiden. Laughs a lot, gets other people caught in the middle, and pushes them off.
- Oosuga Yasutaka: Musashi's '47 Vice Chancellor. A well-built carefree person. Writes love songs!
- "Musashi": Our overall captain automaton. Her sharp-tongued mode is the best. Over.
- "Okutama": Captain of Okutama. "Musashi" tends to do a lot of the work, so she often ends up emptyhanded. Sometimes uses different bodies for different uses.
- Normal Students: Aren't going to work hard this time.
- Aoi Toori: Already a nudist at this point.

Glossary

- ・**襲名**:歴史再現のために適格者が歴史上の人物を襲名すること。
- ・**術式**:流体を加工することで空間中に奇跡を起こすこと。
- ・**白砂台座**:出雲産業座の神社系ブランド。
- ・**神格武装**:通常の武装とは違い、特有の能力を持つ武装。
- ・**神州**:極東のかつての呼び方。
- ・**神道**:極東の教譜。極東の神々を信奏し、神奏術を用いる。
- ・**聖術**:Tsirhc系の術式。旧派は聖譜や聖者関係、改派は聖譜のみから力を導く。
- ・**生徒会**:各教導院の内務、外務などを行う組織。
- ・**聖譜**:前地球時代の歴史を記した歴史書。七組+抄本がある。
- ・**聖譜記述**:聖譜の機能により、前地球時代の歴史が百年先まで自動更新される。が、一六四八年の記述を最後に更新が停止している。
- ・**聖連**:聖譜連盟。歴史再現を主導するための組織。
- ・**奏者**:各教譜の信徒。
- ・**総長連合**:総長を長に、各教導院の警備など、実働と指揮を行う組織。
- ・**卒業**:極東以外の国は無期限制。極東は十八歳卒業制。

た行

- ・**代演**:術式発動に拝気を使用する代わりに、神の喜ぶものを奉納すること。
- ・**地脈**:空間を構成する流体の流れる経路の内、太いもの。
- ・**Tsirhc**:神の子を長に据えた教譜。聖譜を信奏する。
- ・**Tes.**【テス／テスマント】:“応答”“了解”的意。
- ・**三征西班牙**【トレスエスパニア】:大内、大友家＋スペインのこと。ポルトガルも併合中。

あ行

- ・**出雲産業座**(IZUMO):極東最大規模の企業座。極東の神社の總本山で武藏の建造を担った企業。
- ・**六護式仏蘭西**【エグザゴンフランセーズ】:毛利家＋フランスのこと。
- ・**ATELL**:流体の最小単位。術式に使用する。
- ・**英國**:イングランド。浮遊島を用いており、極東の土地や大名を支配していない。
- ・**M.H.R.R.**:羽柴家＋神聖ローマ帝国のこと。

か行

- ・**外燃拝氣**:自分の外に蓄積された拝氣のこと。流体燃料などが該当。
- ・**旧派**【カトリック】:古くから存在するTsirhcの主流。
- ・**教導院**:学校施設のこと。実質上の政軍中心部。分校が多く存在する。
- ・**教譜**:神や聖譜を信奏する組織。集団。
- ・**極東**:重奏統合騒乱の後、神州をこう呼ぶ。
- ・**K.P.A.Italia**【ケーピーエーイタリア】:安芸諸国連合＋イタリア都市連合のこと。
- ・**賢鉱石**、**賢水**:流体を含んだ鉱石、水。流体燃料としても使用可能。
- ・**校則法**:聖連が取り決めた教導院間の基本法。

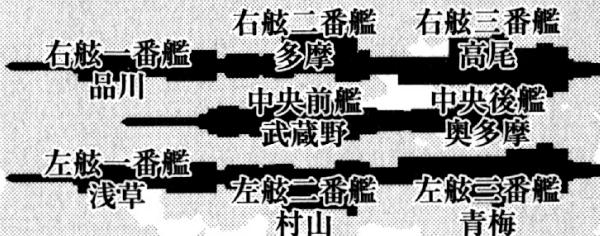
さ行

- ・**Jud.**【ジャッジ／ジャッジメント】:咎人用の“応答”“了解”的意。
- ・**重奏世界**:かつて神州のコピーを置いた異空間のこと。地脈制御で保たれていた。
- ・**重奏統合争乱**:重奏世界が崩壊した際に生じた重奏世界側住人と現実世界側(神州)住人の戦争。重奏世界側が勝利して神州は暫定支配を受ける。
- ・**重奏領域**:落ちてきた重奏世界の神州が、砕けながら現実側に合一した箇所。

words

words

・武藏:航空都市艦。極東に許された唯一の独立領土。



・武藏アリアダスト学院:武藏上、奥多摩に存在する極東の代表校。

・矛盾許容:この世界の基礎能。あらゆる物理法則の同時存在を叶える。

・ムラサイ:Tsrhcとは別に聖譜を信奏する後発派。

ら行

・流体:矛盾許容型の空間構成要素。

・流体燃料:燃料として精製された流体。外燃拝気や、流体駆動器に用いられる。

・流体駆動器:流体の空間変異力を用いた駆動器。効果は内部の紋章などによって変化する。

・流体炉:空間から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈炉より出力は低いが比較的安全。

・歴史再現:聖譜記述を人々が再現して世界の流れを保つこと。

な行

・内燃拝気:自分の中にため込んだ拝気のこと。

は行

・拝気:人間が一時間存在するために必要な流体。3600ATELL。術式の消費ATELL換算単位。

・P.A.ODA【ピーエーオダ】:織田家+オスマン。

・表示枠:各教譜の基本加護を使用するための術式デバイス。

・改派【プロテスタント】:旧派腐敗からの脱却と時代に合わせたTsrhcの新流。

・武神:人が同化して動く巨大な人型機械。

・奉納:神に、神の喜ぶものや内燃拝気を納めること。献納。

ま行

・走狗【マウス】:神道教譜と奏者の仲介をする靈獸型デバイス。他教譜では走徒とも言う。

・魔術:歐州で絶賛迫害中の民間術式。

・末世:この世の終わり。聖譜の歴史記述が途切れる一六四八年のこと。

・帝:神格者、京にて神器による地脈制御を行っているとされる。俗世に関与しない。

・三河:元信公の地脈炉暴走崩壊で消滅。

●この頃の浅間の予定●



「姉ちゃん!姉ちゃん!地下に何しに行くんだよ!?」



「フフフ地弟。地下にある浅間神社の倉庫に雅楽祭用の楽器を物色しに行くんだけど、地下に現れた怪異らしき反応も御祓しに行くのよ?」

A

- Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

B

- Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour.
3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

- Catholic: The old mainstream version of Tsirhc.
- Chancellor's Officers: An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
- Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

- Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

- Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.

G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.

H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells: Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.

I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO: The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

- Judge/Judgment: Means “understood”. Used by criminals.

K

- K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Ley Line: The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.

M

- Magic: Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.: Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa: Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mlasi: A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse: A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

O

- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Nero: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A. Oda: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Protestant: A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.

R

- Religion: Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

- Shinto: Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises: IZUMO's shrine brand.
- Sign Frame: Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
- Spell: Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Student Council: The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution: Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.

T

- Tes/Testament: Means “understood”.
- Testament: A history book that provides the history of the earth’s previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions: History of the earth’s previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union: An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Tres España: Ouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsirhc: A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

Asama's Plans

Toori: Sis! Sis! What're you going underground for!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Under brother? We're going to check on the instruments for the Gagaku Festival that are stored in an Asama Shrine storehouse underground, but we're also going to purify an apparent mysterious phenomenon that appeared down there.

Chapter 5: Evictors in a Place of Accumulation

第五章

『集積場の追い立て者達』



What do you lose

The more you tell yourself to calm down?

Point Allocation (Composed Thoughts)

Adele was a vassal.

A vassal was essentially a knight's manager. They acted as the knight's outrider on the battlefield and they worked as the knight's aide. That was their role.

Of course, the battlefield and general state of affairs had changed in modern times.

They no longer fought in great clashes or group battles with a primary focus on the knights. Nowadays, both groups formed separate company-sized units with individualized roles which moved independently on the battlefield.

The vassal unit would secure the front line and stop the enemy while the knights would perform a charge.

Meanwhile, the normal warriors who could not fight on that level would use their numbers to put together a defensive formation like the Tercio in an attempt to neutralize the knights' charge and vassal unit's front line.

That was the standard form of modern warfare.

...But that standard form is already falling apart.

In the modern knight nation of Hexagone Française, their knights were equipped with gods of war, so a human-level defensive formation was losing all meaning against them.

In the ancient knight nation of M.H.R.R., most of their vassals were quasi-knights, so they could perform a charge with the same high-speed mobile shells as their knights.

In the Mlasi-connected P.A. Oda, they had strengthened their aerial forces, so every nation was constructing city-class defense systems.

"The Far East is really falling behind with all these changes to the battlefield."

"Not necessarily," replied Mitotsudaira.

As a knight, she was Adele's superior, but she was not making a charge at the moment. However, she was holding a BIZEN-made Far Eastern halberd.

"The Far East has changed how it fights on the battlefield, too."

They were in the Musashi's underground. Specifically, in the warehouse wide block on the sixth underground level below the academy on Okutama.

...Or should I say what used to be that wide block?

The wide block had been mostly destroyed.

The former hallway in front of Adele had been widened by the destruction on the left and right. The walls had been completely blown out, creating an empty space from the unused warehouses on either side.

And that revealed...

"Heh heh. That was a little rough, but increasing the ventilation will get rid of the ley line impurity."

Just as Kimi said, this destruction had been to eliminate a mysterious phenomenon. However...

...What kind of technique destroys an entire wide block?

The culprit was the tall figure standing out front. Her black hair swayed as she looked back with a smile.

"Now, I'll get permission from each corporation and club to apply a divine protection to preserve the rooms with cargo inside, so this won't be a problem. Our tasks were purifying the mysterious phenomenon and acquiring instruments from the Asama Shrine's underground storeroom. Let's get on with it, shall we?"

After stating their objectives, Asama sighed and realized everyone was staring at her.

...Eh? Why aren't they saying anything?

She closed up her bow and waited. The others formed a scrum:

“...Who’s going to say it?”

“Well, if no one else is going to...”

Naomasa lightly raised her prosthetic right arm.

She had her *kiseru* in her mouth, but it was not lit.

“What is it, Masa?”

“Did you really need any of us for this mission? I feel like you could handle any mysterious phenomenon on your own just by blasting everything.”

“Oh, no. I couldn’t possibly do that.” Asama opened a sign frame showing a map of this floor and sent a copy to everyone. “I could only blow everything away like this because there wasn’t much cargo in the front and because the corporations here have a close relationship to our shrine. Further in, I need investigative authority for a lot of the rooms, so I can’t do this there. We do have permission to go inside, but we have to keep track of each one individually.”

“Then, Asama-san, did you blow this area up because...?”

“Yes, to makes sure the rest of you did not have to unnecessarily use up your stamina and focus.”

“Hmm.” Naruze nodded. “So it wasn’t to blow off some stress?”

“Huh? Huh? Do I look like that kind of character?”

The others brought their foreheads together again.

“Wait, does she really not build up stress with her personality? That makes her a lot harder to draw...”

“I feel like extended exposure to Toori-san and Kimi-san made her go crazy so she doesn’t feel stress anymore...”

“Heh heh heh. So my foolish brother and I invited Asama into a stress-free world? Doesn’t that make us sound angelic!? And he’s a nudist, so he really is a cupid! If I see him flying above me, I’ll stick a milk bottle on his dick!”

“I wouldn’t really know, but would it really fit inside a milk bottle?”

"Maybe we could stand to be that carefree, too."

They appeared to be having some sort of weird conversation, but...

"...Huh?"

A presence moved further inside. It came from the exit beyond the vanished walls and the not-yet-vanished dust.

Suzu contacted them via divine transmission.

"Oh, yes. I heard...something."

"I thought as much," said Asama with a nod as the others ended their scrum and faced her.

Kimi tilted her head.

"Did you fail to kill it? You did, didn't you!? And with that huge boom! Oh, Asama, was this your way of showing you're a normal girl by saying, 'Look, I'm not all *that* destructive'!? Do you think femininity is determined by destructive power!? What world do you live in!? But don't worry because that world does exist! It's right here! Jump in here! Into this boobs gap!"

"Kh...! Th-that wasn't my intention...!"

She felt a definite sense of "don't force yourself" from the others, but she ignored it. However...

"Duck down a little," warned Naomasa out of the blue.

Everyone did so.

Something passed above their heads at high speed. It was...

...A bullet?

Mitotsudaira had ducked down and she could tell exactly what had pierced the wall behind her.

...That was a bullet, wasn't it!?

The shot had not been aimed.

It had only been meant to draw their attention and discourage pursuit.

Of course, they were given defensive divine protections inside the Musashi and Asama had strengthened those to the level of the Hidden Dragon battle just in case, so they would only have received a painful impact had that shot hit them. However...

“Is this...a person and not a mysterious phenomenon?”

“Um, wait just a second, okay?”

Asama began a sign frame search while still ducked down.

She was the Asama Shrine’s representative. Musashi’s residents generally had a contract with the Asama Shrine and their data was shared even if their contract was with another shrine.

If someone had attacked the Asama Shrine’s representative, their contract would allow her to search them out right away. However...

“That’s odd... I doubt it’s a stowaway, but I can’t find anything.”

“Did the automatic anti-crime interception spell not react? They would normally receive a divine punishment if they attacked you, Tomo.”

“Hmmm... This is weird. It wasn’t canceled, but it’s like they managed to get around it... Oh, but more importantly...”

“What is it?”

“It’s fairly common for what you thought was a mysterious phenomenon to actually be a person. And if this search cancelation was caused by a ley line distortion, then it would still qualify as a ‘mysterious phenomenon’. But...”

Asama trailed off, so Kimi continued for her.

“A shrine maiden can’t shoot a person, right?”

“N-no, that wasn’t my problem here...”

Everyone fell silent.

And after a while, Naito suddenly opened a Magie Figur.

She held it close to her face so the others could not see what it said and she spoke in complete monotone.

"Oh, my. According to some information from the Technohexen Guild, that was a *mysterious phenomenon disguised as a person* that just fled."

"Hmm." Naruze nodded, looked at the bullet hole on the wall, and spoke in complete monotone. "It uses a gun? What a troublesome mysterious phenomenon. But *since it isn't a person*, a shrine maiden would be able to shoot it, right?"

"Eh? Eh?"

Asama was utterly confused and Mitotsudaira placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Um, uh, Mito?"

"It's okay, Tomo. ...Let's go beat up that *mysterious phenomenon disguised as a person!*"

Suzu sat on the front steps of the Asama Shrine's outer shrine. The corners of her mouth bent at the sound she heard in the distance.

...I-I'm...worried.

But not about the others.

...I'm worried...about Okutama.

"Um, 'Musashi'-sama? I have a feeling a certain someone is actively destroying my underground area. Over."

"Listen, 'Okutama'. You must not make decisions based on 'a feeling'. And I am busy preparing Sakai-sama's lunch. Over."

"Umm, what kind of lunch? Over."

"He had stir-fried vegetables and stew yesterday, so I have a feeling chicken will satisfy him today. Over."

"'Musashi'-sama, did you just create a rule that everyone else has to follow but you don't? Over."

"You are imagining it. And more importantly..."

“More importantly?”

“The destruction has moved much deeper. I have also detected a reading near the hull that is separate from Asama-sama’s group. Be careful. Over.”

Naito felt somewhat fulfilled.

She was deep inside the warehouse wide block. The area contained corporate goods and important property. Once in here, Asama could not use her large-scale blasts, so...

“It’s Ga-chan and my time to shine...!”

She would fire a coin bullet that followed Naruze’s guideline.

The battlefield was inside one of the warehouse rooms.

This entire district was made up of warehouse wide blocks, a lot of the wide blocks were connected into a single large warehouse, and the layout differed between management organizations. Some were a single large rectangular space and others were divided into narrower rectangles. Some were connected by curved corridors and others had a single large hallway down the center.

A lot had an atrium connecting the lower and upper floors and others had walkways across.

They were filled with large wooden containers which were in turn filled with mid and small-sized boxes, creating a layout separate from the actual corridors and rooms.

To make matters worse, most of the lights were off. The winged pair could fly over all the structures in the way, but there were boxes and dangling winches or chains hidden in the darkness.

Asama had given them night-vision charms as a countermeasure. Once activated, the charms grew transparent and the darkness was purified when viewed through them.

...Wow, these have got to be expensive...

Naito was somewhat hesitant, but Naruze did not mind.

"These are more useful than light-amplification spells. We won't be blinded even if we fly out into a bright corridor."

"Oh, that's right. And now that I think about it, this method is a lot like my reduction spells."

The reduction of Schwarz Techno was a lot like the purification of Shinto in some ways. Musashi had lights on even at night, so night-vision spells were not really necessary. Even so...

"I should store a spell of my own in my broom's Orei Metallo."

...Giving myself a wider range of spells is probably a good thing.

With that in mind, Naito held Asama's charm vertically and stuck it between her Technohexen hat and her forehead. She had it cover her right eye which she used for targeting.

Her left eye was dark and her right eye had the power to see through darkness. *It sounds like one of Bara-yan's cringeworthy novels*, she thought while moving forward.

There were two enemies. They were dressed in white full-body tights. ...*No, they're mysterious phenomena made from white ether. Humanoid ones. Yes, that's what we're claiming, I guess.*

She did not know how, but those enemies were avoiding Asama's search while fleeing through the warehouse district.

And if they were fleeing...

Gold Mar: "Do you think they're doing some kind of 'job'?"

Mal-Ga: "Who knows. ...Should we check out all the cargo around here?"

There was no way they could do that. And that helped them decide what to do.

They would shoot. They aimed for the path ahead of the two enemies who were moving at a decent clip. Fire a bullet there and it was guaranteed to hit. Since this was a warehouse, the cargo was in the way, but...

"Ga-chan!"

“Judge, I’m used to drawing it where I can’t see.”

Once the guideline was in place, Naito fired.

She heard the solid sound of the air being struck and she felt her broom shake.

The bullet she launched was a coin. She had given it a slight angle upon firing and that drew a curve soon thereafter.

“I really wish I could draw a three-dimensional line all the way to them.”

“If you tried to do that now, Ga-chan, you’d have to fly right up to the enemy, wouldn’t you?”

“Do you think that would be too dangerous?”

“If only we had faster and more mobile brooms.”

“I know,” agreed Naruze as she turned her back on her partner to face forward.

A moment later, the bullet reached the enemy.

The bullet dug into the back of the fat mysterious phenomenon that had been running behind the other one.

“Judge!”

The enemy was blown away with an audible impact. It disappeared behind the cargo, but...

“Now it’s our turn!”

A figure rushed forward on either side of the Technohexen.

It was Mitotsudaira and Adele.

Adele ran across the top of the cargo containers.

Once Naito and Naruze fired, it was their job to immediately secure the enemy.

Even if the enemy got away, they would continue pursuit, apply pressure, and finally capture them.

It was the relationship between the hunter and the hound.

The Extra Special Duty Officer seemed to have an issue with doing a dog's work, but saying her job was to charge the enemy had worked as a compromise. That just left actually doing it.

"...Oh."

The chains and cranes dangling down from the ceiling were dangerous.

She had a night-vision charm below her glasses, but that did not make the obstacles go away. They were arranged in what seemed like a random layout, so Adele could see why Naito and Naruze were being so cautious as they flew.

But Adele was short enough that those hanging obstacles were not much of an issue.

The power of the charm made the darkness look like predawn.

...Nighttime maintenance would be so much easier with something like this...

She had been doing that every night lately.

She had to service the mobile shell that was the representative piece of vassal equipment.

Her father had left it for her, but it had been passed down by her ancestors, later modified into a female-model, and sometimes used for work by her father when he was alive.

...So its parts have gotten really rusty and deteriorated.

Thanks to that, she had needed to dismantle it and reassemble it. She had been working on that since halfway through the previous year. Her father's death was part of the reason this was necessary, but there was no helping that. She decided to view it all as her father's love teaching her about the machine and how to service it.

She had earned her mobile shell license at 16 and she had even gotten the restriction on old models removed.

She hoped to make her debut as a vassal with a mobile shell during her third and final year in high school. So...

“Now is the time to prepare for that...!”

With that, she pursued the enemy. She moved across the containers and, when she came to a gap, she ran across instead of jumping. She simply lengthened her stride to cross the gap.

And she continued on.

She had seen the enemy’s location earlier. The only way out of there was the door into the passageway.

I need to hurry, she told herself just as the Extra Special Duty Officer fell behind her.

On a stack of two wooden containers, she had kicked off the edge to leap to the next row, but...

“Oh?”

She had carelessly kicked too hard.

Instead of kicking off of the container, she kicked the container behind her.

...Huh?

She had meant to catch the edge with her toes to kick it, but the container spun and slammed into the ceiling.

How much power does she have? thought Adele.

Having lost her support partway through the jump, the Extra Special Duty Officer entered a downward spin and crashed into the container ahead of her.

Naruze was gently flying and occasional stepping on a container while watching the two out ahead.

The container that hit the ceiling was destroyed and shattered. Down below, something crashed into a container and smashed it to pieces with a loud noise. As for why this happened...

“Why is that wolf playing around on her own?”

“I think Mito-tsan might have some pent-up frustration since To-chan has

been ignoring her lately.”

Margot explained that while loading a sniper spell in her broom, but then... “Oops.”

She suddenly moved closer to Naruze.

“Oh, dear,” said Naruze as she supported Margot in midair. She liked feeling her partner’s body heat on her left side, but: “What are you doing, Margot? Acrobatics?”

There was something on top of Margot’s Technohexen hat.

It was a large cosmetics case. It had likely been in the container that had hit the ceiling and broken apart.

What is that? wondered Naruze as she picked it up. And from up ahead...

“————!”

With what sounded like a roar of rage, the row of containers up ahead exploded.

“Huh?”

She wrinkled her brow and the two of them ducked to dodge a chain hanging from the ceiling. Then they moved their wings to fly to the next level of containers. There, they viewed the scene up ahead.

Mitotsudaira had forcefully plowed through the row of containers, causing them to collapse.

And they had not been pushed to the sides. They flew forward through the air.

While they listened to the cacophony of the containers breaking and bouncing from Mitotsudaira’s running speed, Margot wrapped an arm around Naruze’s waist and spoke with some admiration in her voice.

“Good.” She used the night-vision spell to view the scene through one eye. “Mito-san has started working off that frustration.”

Adele saw the container explosion pursuing her.

...*Ohhh!?*

She knew more or less what had happened.

“Extra Special Duty Officer!?”

“You pieces of junk!!”

The silver wolf had given up on moving along the top of the containers, so she was running along the floor. However, she was not avoiding the rows of containers.

“...!”

She was forcing them out of the way, sending them flying, and kicking them into the air to clear a path. As a result, her path was drawn out by scattering containers.

It was definitely flashy. Adele thought it was okay for her to destroy the containers, but...

“Wait...what is this!?” shouted the wolf as she bit at and dragged out the contents of the scattering containers.

She held a largish cosmetics case between her teeth. It was printed with a drawing of a girl.

“‘The Outrage of Anagni, But Spelled Slightly Differently’? Isn’t this a porn game!?”^[1]

“Um, yes,” confirmed Margot as she and Naruze pursued the traveling container explosion.

Naruze gave a more thorough answer to Mitostudaira’s question while looking at the porn game box in her hand.

“The package art is kind of low quality. This is probably shoddy camouflage for the smuggled items inside.”

“They would go that far?”

"Yes, well, I'm sure they have their reasons. But..."

Naruze suddenly looked at Margot.

Her blue eye viewed Margot through the night-vision spell.

...Eh?

Instead of a meaningful signal, it was...

...A request?

No, it was nothing that formal. It was more of a "You understand, don't you?"

It did not say what Margot was supposed to understand, but she knew what Naruze meant and wordlessly nodded. *Leave it to me*, she thought. Naruze's eyebrows rose slightly and she smiled a little.

Then the Weiss Hexen dressed as a white shrine maiden said what that look had meant.

"If you ask me, those two enemies we're pursuing...are definitely mysterious phenomena."

They aren't people? thought Adele when she heard Naruze.

The Technohexen's words echoed across the warehouse from beyond the Extra Special Duty Officer's violent charge.

"Adele, Mitotsudaira. These containers probably contain smuggled porn games. This warehouse district is right next to the hull after all. A few of the porn games being smuggled into the Musashi must have been carried directly here from the transport ship."

"Hm? Wouldn't they arrive at Asakusa or Shinagawa?" asked Adele.

"That's the blind spot."

"Right," said Naito. "There are frequent firefights on Shinagawa and Asakusa when smuggling groups are discovered, right? The battles generally get pulled all the way back to Okutama, but..."

"The transport ships at Shinagawa and Asakusa will be evacuated so they

aren't caught in the gunfire."

That was enough for Adele to mostly figure it out.

"So one of the transport ships evacuated to Okutama was actually already loaded with smuggled porn games?"

"Right, right. And by the time those idiots act as a diversion and draw the firefight over this way, all the games have been loaded in the warehouses already. And since the diversion heads to Okutama and is wiped out before arriving, no one will think of checking the warehouses here. At best, you might think they hid something on the way to Okutama."

"Then," said Adele as she ran. "What makes you say those white things must be mysterious phenomena and not people?"

"Umm, they're wicked thoughts," immediately replied Naruze. "Wicked thoughts have taken human form and turned into that."

"Wicked thoughts?"

"Judge." Naruze made a jump to catch up to Adele. "Wicked thoughts...can be frightening. They have great power. I mean, even if it rains during a doujin event, the weather will clear up partway through if the event has enough wicked thoughts."

"That *is* dangerous."

"Judge. Do you understand how fearsome wicked thoughts are now?"

She did not really understand, but she was not entirely sure she wanted to understand. Regardless, Technohexen knew a lot about ether, so it was best to trust them on this.

...I guess this means troublesome mysterious phenomena are appearing on Musashi now.

Mysterious phenomena on the level of pranks would occasionally crop up. The divine network would list spots well-known for occasionally having a few extra steps on the stairs or for a puddle that disappeared when you looked back. However...

"Eh?"

While trying to catch up, the Extra Special Duty Officer had just attacked the last row of containers.

That caused the containers Adele was standing on to shake. And...

"...Oh?"

Adele realized she had missed her footing.

She cried out and flew through the air.

The wicked thought that had been hit by the coin bullet had only just recovered.

The other one continued to flee without stopping.

"Are you okay, Koni-tan!? If you're going to die, do it on your own!"

"Th-that is some impressive resolve, Nobu-tan!"

Nobu-tan was sent flying when a vassal spun through the air and struck the back of his head with her heel.

The vassal continued on and collided with the containers to the side. She broke through them and seemed to have passed out.

Meanwhile, Koni-tan mercilessly fled without stopping and ran right by Nobu-tan as he tried to crawl along the floor.

"Are you okay, Nobu-tan! If you're going to die, feel free to do so on your own!"

"I won't give you a copy!!"

Koni-tan came to a stop.

"N-no fair!!"

As soon as he said that, the pile of containers behind him collapsed. And the Mito Lord's voice could be heard from beyond them.

"Dosukoooooi!!"

With an exclamation from the latest trend in standing martial arts, the great mass of containers collided with the floor and walls.

"How about that!?" asked Mitotsudaira as she made two flat-handed slaps.

...Honestly, I can't believe this place existed below the academy.

The mountain of containers in front of her was slowly beginning to collapse again.

It could not keep its balance, so it fell toward the corridor on the other side, but...

"I need to get out into the corridor to check on some things."

Now that they knew this was a smuggling warehouse, they had to open up the entire wide block and investigate it.

...This is going to be even more work.

"Oh, wait, wait."

A voice reached her from the air behind her.

Naito and Naruze had caught up.

They moved their wings, grabbed a chain dangling from the ceiling, and dropped down. They stepped on a surviving container behind Mitotsudaira and then hopped to the floor.

They went to a lot of effort in that descent, but they must have felt the need for caution in this darkness.

Naito then rushed over.

"Um, Mito-san?"

"Huh? What is it?"

"Well, y'see? Didn't you go a little far with your physical attacks?"

"Eh? But catching up to them was my job and they were running away..."

"Ohh..." Naito's mouth stretched opened horizontally and she began a conversation with Naruze: "Did she not hear?" "Well, she was making a lot of noise."

"What is this about?" asked Mitotsudaira.

"Eh? Well..." Naito pointed beyond the containers behind her. "They escaped earlier...since they're wicked thoughts."

Her attack had not been as effective as Asama shooting them.

"So do you agree that 'officially' those are wicked thoughts?"

"'Officially' they're wicked thoughts?" repeated Mitotsudaira with a tilt of the head.

But those two had clearly been...

"They seemed like humans to me..."

"No, they were definitely wicked thoughts. Or something like it."

Naito sounded annoyed, so Mitotsudaira decided to just accept that.

...It's true that's a possibility.

Was there some reason they had to view it that way? Meanwhile, another stack of containers collapsed behind them.

"Ohh," said Naito as she looked up at the collapsed pile of containers in front of them. "Well, I suppose this did help drive them in the right direction."

"No, we can't look at it like that now that we know they're wicked thoughts." Mitotsudaira was mostly speaking to herself as she breathed a sigh. "I attacked without any anti-spirit divine protections. It's true no one explained the situation to me, but I should have considered it as a possibility."

The possibility of a mysterious phenomenon had been stated from the beginning, so she belatedly realized she should not have used brute force just because the enemy looked so very human.

How to fight spirits was one of the main lessons in anti-nonhuman combat classes. She had overlooked that, but there was a reason for it: "You should have some spirit divine protections as a Loup-Garou and that should give anti-spirit properties to any direct attack you make, but I guess it doesn't work through containers."

"Hmm... I wasn't thinking and just assumed they would gain an extension of my divine protections."

Because humans and most other nonhumans lacked spirit abilities, they had difficulty touching spirits. They could use charms and spells to make up for that, but Mitotsudaira did not need those things.

That was an advantage of her species, but...

"I completely forgot I need to apply the divine protections to my weapons."

"Well, it's not like you have a chance to fight spirits all that often."

She was ashamed she could only nod at Naruze's kind comment.

Would such opportunities increase if she officially joined the Chancellor's Officers?

...Honestly.

She thought the same thing she had earlier.

...I'm supposed to be a knight, but I still lack so very much.

And just as she sighed again...

"Um..."

The pile of containers in front of her spoke.

It was Adele.

"I'm completely stuck in a box near the back. Could you help me out?" she asked. "Also, based on the footsteps I heard, the wicked thoughts continued on in the right direction. So, Extra Special Duty Officer, can't you think of this as doing your job properly?"

The wicked thoughts passed through the gate out of the warehouse wide block and entered a long block that acted as a large passageway.

They were on their way to the hull. Because...

"Now we can escape, Nobu-tan!"

"Yes, that was a close one!"

The collapse of all those containers truly had been dangerous.

They were lucky they had noticed one of the falling porn game containers was for the bonus item. The bonus item for the smuggled porn games was a handkerchief shaped like lace underwear and the container carrying them had come open in midair, so they had managed to have it land on top of them.

The bonus items inside were bulky, but they were only cloth. The two of them had managed to force themselves inside.

“Then the container protected us from the other falling containers and we were moved outside as the container was pushed out from the center!”

The two wicked thoughts raced down the passageway while wearing the handkerchiefs over their heads.

That was when they heard a voice from the center of the ship behind them.

“Hit!”

Asama had stored up her Blessings.

She had been waiting for this moment when the enemy was driven out of the warehouse by the others.

They had initially begun pursuit when the enemy had fled, but Naomasa had stopped them.

“There’s a corridor here that circles around ahead of them.”

It was not on the same floor as the warehouse.

It was a maintenance corridor located between the upper and lower floors.

Anyone from the engine division could freely enter it, so Naomasa, Asama, and Kimi used it to circle around to the long block the enemy would reach.

The enemy had tried to lose pursuit in the confusion, but that had only bought Asama’s group more time. So...

...We need Mito, Adele, Naito, and Naruze to pursue them as blatantly as possible!

Their pursuit was meant to drive the enemy out here while also hiding the fact that Asama’s group had circled on ahead.

With Naomasa in the lead, they crossed a bamboo catwalk in the dim darkness. And they ultimately reached a long block near the stern.

It was a transport district which was rarely used. And nearby...

...Oh, there's our storehouse.

We need to check out the instruments on the way back, Asama reminded herself.

"There they are," said Kimi.

About twenty meters away, a gate to a warehouse wide block on the left wall opened and two white figures ran out.

They did not notice the girls.

And there was no reason to let them notice. This was not a duel between warriors or a tournament between knights. It was the Shinto purification of some mysterious phenomena. That was all it was.

Kimi caught up from behind and amplified Asama's spell with a dance.

Asama had already opened up Kataume and set up her firing spell.

...I'll use a diffusion-type so they can't escape!

She could not use this technique in their mock battles against Oriotorai because it could damage the city. She had already used one to blow away the warehouse earlier, but that had been close to firing a blank.

She was now preparing a specialized arrow.

"...!"

The enemy started to look back.

But it was too late.

Asama announced that she had them in her sights and she released her power.

Kimi saw a blast of pressure rather than destruction.

...Well done.

The arrow loosed from Asama's bow came to a brief but definite stop in midair. A moment later, wind blew from the tip and spread out like an umbrella.

"Ha ha."

The passageway created from the series of long blocks was 36m wide. This floor was primarily used for warehouses, so the ceiling was tall.

A pressure flew out and seemed to sweep across the entire passageway.

Kimi could tell her dance had amplified it. But what if?

...What would happen if I added in a song too?

Asama would not be thinking the same thing. The thought came from Kimi's love of exciting festivals.

But if Asama, Mitotsudaira, and she could mutually amplify each other with song and dance...

...Wouldn't we be able to do just about anything?

With that thought, Kimi tapped her heels as part of her dance.

A moment later, the launched pressure struck the enemy while still spread out across the entire passageway.

But even after hitting the two white enemies, the attack did not lose its momentum.

"Huh?"

Kimi did not know why Asama had tilted her head after blowing away the enemies.

"What is it, Asama? According to my brilliant prediction, that's going to continue on and blow through the hull door."

"W-wait! I didn't plan for that much power!"

"It's okay. Don't worry, Asama."

I wonder what the morning paper is going to say tomorrow, thought Kimi.

"If you ask me, this way is a lot more fun."

Mitotsudaira pushed a container as she ran down the corridor from the warehouse wide block to the long block.

Adele was inside the small wooden container. It had two meter sides and was about a meter tall, so with the top lid removed, Adele could hold onto the edge and look forward.

Warped portions of the floor sometimes made the container hop upwards, but it did not topple over.

The container was filled with some necessary items.

“These confiscated porn games, bonus items, and such should be enough evidence.”

“I really want to avoid thinking about how I was buried in that stuff,” said Adele.

“What’s wrong with doing that from time to time?” unhelpfully asked Naruze from behind.

But then they heard Naito suddenly flap her wings extra hard.

“Hm? What is it, Margot?”

“Oh, um.” Naito nodded and once more flapped her six wings extra hard. “It’s just a bit dangerous is all.”

She used her main wings to flip forward and make an emergency landing. It was a rushed action that did not use her ability to hover. Naruze then flew past Mitotsudaira, but Mitotsudaira soon caught up.

“What is it!?”

“Oh, you’ll be fine, Mito-tsan.”

As soon as Naito said that, the “pressure” arrived.

All the air around them was moving.

It moved from back to front. And...

“Eh?”

As Mitotsudaira's hair was swept forward, Adele floated up from the container.

...Ehh!?

It happened so suddenly she did not have time to take another breath.

"Here it comes," said Naito, but her voice was drowned out partway through.

It was the wind. A pressure pushed at all the air around them.

...The hull was blown open!?

While waiting at the Asama Shrine with Suzu, "Okutama" felt her ship shake a little.

The reason why was obvious.

"An internal impact triggered an emergency opening of the starboard stern hull door on the sixth underground level. I was prepared for the worst with Asama-sama's group at work in that area, so I am glad this was the worst of the damage. Over."

"U-um, what happened...to them?"

Good question, thought "Okutama".

The Musashi's ships used buffering spells for atmospheric protection, so damage to the hull would not suck everything outside due to a pressure difference.

But Asama's arrow had been a problem.

The amplified attack had also purified the atmospheric protection.

That level of attack should have been weak enough to remain inside the ship. Thus, Asama had likely concluded it was safe to use in the transport district even if it did destroy the divine protections in the surrounding space.

But it had been amplified.

The air inside the ship would have been one thing, but the door had been opened by the impact.

That had allowed the purification side effect to reach outside the ship, which meant...

"It penetrated the atmospheric protection, so a portion of the air regained its original pressure. Over."

"Okutama" heard a sound from aft and starboard.

It was a dry sound much like a popgun.

The suction from the pressure difference had slammed into the air within the ship.

Chapter 6: Visitor on the Open Surface

第六章

『開放面の来客』



Even if you don't think you've ever met them

You still feel déjà vu

Point Allocation (Famous Person)

The afternoon sky was surrounded by the white of a stealth barrier.

That was the sky of the aerial city ship named Musashi.

But that sky was currently somewhat crowded.

“Ho ho... So the Asama Shrine performed a mysterious phenomenon purification on starboard Okutama, did they? All flight around the hull at the predicted area was banned and Konishi supplied a transport ship for defense of the area, so I doubt any of our idiots were caught in the blast, but still.”

That comment came from an elderly man in the sky above starboard Musashino. He rode a small delivery boat.

“Almirante!”

A woman called up to him from the city below.

The man known as Almirante made a descent, tail end first. He lowered the flying boat until it set down on the tallest roof in the city.

“What is it, Marine? ...I’m on my way to Takao, but do you want a ride?”

“Oh, yes, please! Thanks to that blast, they’re only letting personal equipment fly to Takao along a set route!”

“That’s because the air currents – well, the ether currents, really – are a mess. Fine, then. ...Hop on.”

“Judge.”

The blonde-haired, four-winged woman took a single step and flew up from the small balcony sticking out from the third floor of a shop where she had picked up a delivery.

The woman known as Marine arrived at the back of Almirante’s flying boat two stories up from that balcony. She hopped onto the cargo section. She had

cross-shaped thrusters attached to her shoulders and hips, so she stuck her back out from the cargo section to make sure they did not hit anything.

“I’m ready to go.”

“You’ve really gotten the hang of those thrusters, haven’t you?”

“Eh? Oh, judge. For the most part.”

“Those were designed for fighting gods of war and for boarding ships to begin close-quarters combat. It’s like something a pirate would use. I thought they would use those during the coming Armada battle to fly over to the enemy ships and make a mess of things, but...”

“They were ultimately rejected because they’re too dangerous for non-winged species if they malfunction or get damaged. Tres España’s Chancellor really looks at things rationally.”

“You can’t underestimate that commander.”

“Really?”

“Really,” said Almirante as the flying boat ascended.

He said nothing more on that matter and asked a question instead.

“They’re doing the Null Vier again today, so what are you going to do?”

“I set a record yesterday, so today I’m going to complete the deliveries I couldn’t get to then.”

“Focusing on your work is always a good thing.”

“It is my main job, after all,” she said. “But I also like my side job. Although I’m not sure you can call betting on races a job.”

“You know,” said Almirante. “If you’re trying to reinstate my position, don’t bother.”

Almirante started down the route toward Takao. He piloted on the right side. When flying around the Musashi or between the ships, you flew on the right side and passed people on the right.

"So not even the boss of the delivery business can ignore the flight rules just because there's a festival coming up, huh?"

"You can leave that to Mane and Single Mom."

"Almirante..." Marine's hair fluttered in the wind as she spoke. "What do you think about Tres España facing the history recreation of its decline?"

"I sympathize with my old home's struggles, but I don't view myself as one of them."

"I can't separate myself from my home that much."

"I see," muttered Almirante. "Even if you win here, returning won't be easy."

"I don't intend to return," said Marine. She looked to the delivery workers preparing for the Null Vier in the distant sky above Shinagawa. "But after coming all this way, I don't want anyone looking at us with pity."

"Do you know why I lost to Zwei Fräulein?"

"...Their skilled combination work and the mobility of six wings."

"I see..."

Almirante nodded deeply and Marine glared at him.

"Please don't act like you only just now figured it out."

"People always did say I view things differently."

"And that's why Chancellor Segundo divided our ship out separately."

They entered the stacked air lanes between the ships and Almirante tilted the flying boat.

"It's crowded and this cargo is heavy, so let's go in from below."

"Oh, I'll get off here, so you're fine."

"Don't do anything too crazy."

Marine nodded at Almirante's warning as he faced forward and placed the flying boat in the flow of traffic.

"Zwei Fräulein are apparently down below to help the Asama Shrine on a job from 'Musashi'. ...And they slayed a Hidden Dragon with the Asama Shrine's

representative yesterday. What does that mean?" She stood on the edge of the flying boat. "They're forming a powerful party and they defeated a dragon, but is that just because they're part of the standard framework? I mean, we did things like that, too."

"The ocean at the New World was so beautiful. ...And there were dragons there too."

"Marine was the Urban Name I got there. Even though I was an aerial fighter." She smiled and moved her wings. "Don't worry. I won't overlook my chance at victory."

"Really?"

By the time Almirante looked back, she had already left the flying boat.

"...I didn't even feel the boat rock."

But when he looked up, he saw four wings flying high in the sky.

"I see," he said. "Flying higher is a good thing in my opinion. ...The more exciting the festival, the better."

...This is unexpectedly exciting.

Naruze and Margot embraced each other while they resisted the wind.

The release of air was on a small scale, so they knew it would settle down before long. All Musashi residents received training just in case.

The divine protection supplied by the Asama Shrine via the Musashi allowed them to breathe, but that was all they had now. The automatons were not using gravitational control to anchor their feet to the floor and Asama was not separating them from the surrounding environment with a barrier.

They had to crouch low so they would not be dragged downwind.

Naruze turned to the right, stretched her right leg downwind and planted her heel on the floor. She crouched down far enough that her left knee reached her chest and she supported her upper body with the thigh.

If she was pulled downwind, her right heel would hold her in place.

She let her six wings blow in the wind, but that was not much of an issue since they were being sucked toward her leg. There was something else she had to worry about more.

“Margot.”

She doubted the other girl could hear her, but she did receive a response in the form of a tap on the shoulder from the arm holding her tight.

So Naruze lowered Margot toward the floor as if embracing her.

Immediately afterwards, a porn game box flew through where her head had just been. And it was a limited edition instead of the standard edition. That meant it used a paulownia box with a divine figurine inside.

...That was close!

The problem was how large limited editions had gotten recently. The worst ones were the ones packaged in treasure chests “for the Caribbean Sea”.

...That means you, Team Velázquez.

Meanwhile, things were descending from “above” to “below” in the air above the floor.

Most of them were not a problem since they were floating pretty high up, but the smaller they were, the lower they came.

Then the two of them conversed via text.

“Remember how excited everyone got during the emergency training when we had to throw things to the people bracing themselves within the pressurized barrier?”

“Yeah, they said that would be necessary in a real emergency, didn’t they? Noriki’s ‘lumber’, Naomasa’s ‘steel’, and Mitotsudaira’s ‘rock’ were fairly straightforward, but the idiot’s ‘spring roll’ was a problem. He flew too high and we failed the first time.”

Some broken pieces of lumber flew toward them, so they dodged it. Margot then nodded and continued.

“That first time, didn’t Asama-chi try to dodge him, but Kimi-chan tripped and

got hit?"

"And Asama threw a 'sake bottle' to the idiot, so that really didn't help. The second time, Kimi tripped, was sent flying, and got hit again."

"Oh, and Mito-tsan and Asama-chi got dragged along with her, so it was all three of them."

"Yeah, I remember. They were all dizzy and their legs were tangled up, so I made a quick sketch and turned it into a doujinshi cover."

"That cover was a complete lie."

"I couldn't help it," said Naruze. "I guess you could blame that on 'wicked thoughts', too."

Margot did not respond to that. Instead...

"_____"

Beyond the sound drowned out by the wind, Margot smiled and patted Naruze's shoulder a few times.

She did not like it when other people did that to her, but it was different when it was Margot. They brought their foreheads together and prepared to kiss in the wind, but...

"Oh, show some tact."

A porn game container flew between them while rotating vertically.

Naruze lightly moved out of the way and sighed. The wind pressure seemed to have passed its peak, but...

"I wonder if Mitotsudaira and the others are all right."

The wooden container pulled Mitotsudaira out into the long block passageway.

The container was being sucked toward the sky beyond the large open door on the hull end of the long block.

Empty space continued for about the length of a long block and the side of

Takao, the third starboard ship, was visible beyond that.

That was about 300 meters away, but she could not see the top from here.

It was like facing a white metal wall.

But the wind was strong. Her hair was blown toward the hole showing Takao and it fluttered out past the container in front of her, but her divine protection as a Loup-Garou was canceling the effects.

The problem was Adele and the container of porn games.

It was completely floating in the air and pulling Mitotsudaira as it was sucked toward the large hole, but...

“Kh.”

Disturbances in the wind changed the angle at which it tugged at the box.

It swung her hands as if deflecting them, which proved to be a problem. That wild motion caused her braced feet to slip from the floor.

“Oh...oh, no, no!”

“Extra Special Duty Officer! Please let go! At this rate, you’ll be sucked out, too!”

“No, Adele! You mustn’t choose to die by falling from the sky with porn games!”

“That’s not what I meant!”

But wouldn’t it end up that way?

Regardless, the container was pulled through the air as if dancing.

And then an especially strong gust arrived. It was...

...The final wind!

This final gust was the end of the wind pressure. She thought they would be safe if they could survive this, but...

“...!”

Her hands lost their grip on the container. That was how powerful the tug was. Mitotsudaira forcibly squeezed her fingers around it to try to pull it back

in, but...

“Huh?”

The edge of the container broke. That was thanks to her right hand’s grip strength. Her right hand pulled back toward her chest with the broken piece in its grasp, so she was only holding the container with her left arm now. That was when Adele turned back toward her.

And she smiled.

“Come to think of it, I can just get out of the box, can’t I?”

“Judge! That is an excellent idea!”

Her left hand also broke the edge and the container flew away.

“Waaaaahh!!”

Adele screamed as she and the container flew up into empty air.

And then...

“Heh heh. Silly girl. Why not look back every once in a while, charging wolf?”

Someone stepped on Mitotsudaira’s shoulder and leaped over her.

It was Kimi.

Kimi leaped over Mitotsudaira who held broken pieces of wood in each hand.

She reached Adele’s container which was losing its balance in midair.

“Oh, right there.”

Her heel lightly kicked at the corner of the rising container.

A moment later, Mitotsudaira saw Adele and the container land hard enough that it dug into the floor and bounced back up.

While the container spun to a stop, Adele gave a shout but did not fall out.

And the final gust of wind blew through.

As it did, the dancer whirled around and descended.

...She’s as insane as ever...

In the Far East, a shrine maiden's job was to offer songs and dances to their god. They were said to have asked for rain and otherwise controlled the weather that way.

Of course, it was only a coincidence that Kimi stood so calmly in the weakening wind after saving Adele. She had not actually controlled that gust.

But that aside...

"Kimi, with that kind of skill, there are so many other things you could be doing."

Mitotsudaira believed that from the bottom of her heart.

But Kimi gave her usual smile and stared at Mitotsudaira with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

"You tactless girl. Is that what you should be saying now? Well, is it? Hm?"

She was right. Mitotsudaira hated doing what Kimi wanted, but there was meaning in bowing her head.

"Thank you very much...for saving us."

She raised her head to see Kimi holding out both hands with the palms up.

"Give me a reward!"

...Why is Kimi always like this...?

Mitotsudaira glared at her both in reality and in her heart as she placed the two broken pieces of wood in Kimi's hands. Kimi held them up to her ears.

"Hmm~ Hold them to your ear and...can't you hear it? It's the voices from the porn game the container held. Can't you hear the porn game voices?"

When Mitotsudaira ignored that, the idiot sister pulled a mic from her cleavage. She wiggled around and opened a sign frame.

"I think my foolish brother played the porn game this was carrying. Do you want to know what it was about?"

...Huh? My king?

Hesitating was a mistake.

Kimi continued right on regardless. She embraced her breasts which held the mic between them.

"It's about a Loup-Garou knight girl. Oh, but I won't tell you who that was modeled after."

"W-wait! What are you talking about!?"

"Heh heh. Want to know who picked it out? It – was – me. But I didn't just choose one modeled after you. I went for a freestyle selection that also included a shrine maiden game, an older sister game, and a foolish little brother game!"

That last half included some dangerous terms, but she chose to ignore it. She would not think about who the partners would be in a king-themed game. *I must not think about it.*

But...

"Well!? Feeling thankful!?"

Mitotsudaira had no idea what that "well" meant, but she did understand that the siblings of the Aoi family were close. And she sort of understood why she might be "thankful".

...And yet all I end up feeling is annoyed.

Regardless, she had not expected Kimi to hold out her palms again.

...Umm.

"C'mon!"

"Could you please not urge a non-entertainer to use repeat material!?"

The Cerberus on her head barked along with her, but then someone else approached. "Now, now," said Asama as she moved between them.

She placed charms in Kimi's hands.

"Eh!? What's this!? Do you want me to grope you!?"

There were no brakes on that girl's lunacy.

But Asama just pointed at the floor nearby.

“‘Okutama’-san contacted me and said the door wasn’t broken, so she wants us to erase the side effects of that amplified blast. And your dance just now created an amplification ‘mold’ here, so...”

“Yes, yes,” said Kimi as she stuck one charm between her breasts and one between her lips and got to work.

As Asama watched her leave, she turned toward Mitotsudaira and lightly bowed her head.

“Sorry. My inept mistake got you caught up in all this.”

“Oh, I know just how unpredictable Kimi can be...”

“She does tend to make things more exciting and I guess that’s mostly because she’s an entertainer, but...I just wish this had been a more open situation like on the Noh Stage or with the Hidden Dragon.” Her shoulders drooped. “Hmm. I can only blame my poor management and control of the situation...”

Mitotsudaira knew what she meant. However...

“Can’t you say that all’s well that ends well?”

“Eh...? You mean my suspicions were right? You really did like what you heard about that porn game...?”

“What is with that shocked look!? And what do you mean your ‘suspicions’!?”

“Well, um...” stammered Asama and Mitotsudaira was aware she was glaring at the shrine maiden.

“Kimi chose a shrine maiden game for him too.”

“Oh, c’mom. She was only joking about all that.”

Did she really not understand or was she just too trusting? Seeing that reaction filled Mitotsudaira with relief, but also with a slight dissatisfaction that was did not quite reach the level of concern.

You’re too self-restrained.

...But is that going to change as well?

That shrine maiden had placed a lid over her desire to perform in a band and hidden it even from herself. A lot of her thoughts were probably still maturing.

If the band was her priority now...

"We're just not suited for doing things in a narrow hall."

"That's true," said Asama with a bitter smile as she viewed the containers and splinters lying around.

And while she walked over to look after dizzy Adele, Naito and Naruze opened a hatch in the floor and Naomasa climbed out.

Naomasa sighed and spoke.

"I adjusted things down below, so the atmospheric defenses should take effect again. But..."

She looked to the starboard hull. Something was visible through the large door that still sat open.

"That's a transport ship from the Konishi Company, isn't it?"

Asama saw the giant transport ship ascend beyond the large door.

It was a Kraken-class measuring more than 350m long. Most of Musashi's transport ships were Dragon-classes measuring 100-150m to match the wide blocks, so this was two or three times that size.

The large ship had an advertisement sign frame on the side and two people stood on the deck.

One was the plump merchant who owned the ship: Konishi. The other was a man in a suit.

"Oh, it's Masazumi's father. He's the effective manager of the Provisional Council."

Just as Mitotsudaira identified him, a sign frame appeared over their heads in the long block passageway. It displayed Konishi's large and narrow-eyed face.

Asama had met him concerning commercial divine protections and for business dealings. He spotted her with the camera-equipped sign frame.

"Thank you very much as always. I am Konishi of the Konishi Company. ...Um, Asama Shrine Representative, you seem to have run across some excitement, but what was that about?"

Oh, thought Asama. They have warehouses around here too. So...

"On a request from 'Musashi'..."

What had those two enemies been? She had blown them away before finding out.

...How am I supposed to describe this?

She was speaking to one of Musashi's leading merchants and politicians. It was possible those two could use any information they received here to further their own interests. It was a tricky situation for the Asama Shrine.

And while she tried to figure it out, Naruze walked up from the side and raised her hand to speak. She opened a crop mark frame Magie Figur and sketched out what they had seen.

"It was a mysterious phenomenon like this. ...Wicked thoughts, if you ask me."

"Wicked thoughts...!?" exclaimed Konishi.

"Judge. They tend to appear where porn games and doujinshis are gathered. ...Two of them appeared, but they were blown away by Asama. It seems the large door was forcibly opened, but they must have been annihilated before that happened."

"Right?" agreed Naito before looking to Asama. "Your searches didn't find anything, but that must have been because they were mysterious phenomena formed from wicked thoughts."

Once the girl mentioned it, that seemed likely. And when things were unclear, it was usually best to settle on the more likely option. For that reason and because the Technohexen seemed to agree, she made her decision.

"I think that is most likely what happened."

"Judge. I see." Konishi gave a deep nod. "Every mysterious phenomenon has its unique traits, so there is no helping that."

Masazumi's father gave a nod of his own.

"If you learn anything more or any more of them appear, consider sending a report to the Provisional Council."

Given their respective positions, that request was easier said than done.

Some mysterious phenomena were like rumors, so they grew as more people learned of them.

That was why he had said to "consider" it.

He had not simply asked her to do it.

Asama understood what that meant, so she smiled and nodded.

"Thank you for your concern. We will handle the rest along with 'Musashi', so please return to what I am sure are busy schedules."

"Judge," they replied before the sign frame vanished.

The transport ship began to rise and the large door began to close.

...That was a close one...

Asama took a breath.

And just then, someone entered the long block from a corridor on the right.

...Huh?

Asama turned back toward the presence she sensed.

"Sorry, but this area is off limits at the moment. Please head back the way you came."

"Testament. You slayed the mysterious phenomenon, didn't you? I am currently working as a freelance hunting gunner, so I had hoped to help out."

It was a nonhuman girl.

She had white skin, she had blue wing-shaped horns on either side of head, and she carried three guns on her back.

"A demon...?"

"Testament."

Asama saw the girl calmly nod.

She stopped walking at a point about 20m away.

She was in a relaxed stance that let her move her arms or legs at a moment's notice.

She nodded in that stance and from that distance.

"With the Honganji battle over, I thought I would take a journey to cleanse myself before joining P.A. Oda, but I found a place near Aki where it looked like I could score some points."

Then she seemed to realize something.

"Oh, and I believe I already greeted you."

"Eh?"

Mitotsudaira looked to the others.

"If any of you remember doing something to her, you should probably just come clean."

"Mito-tsan, you can't just rule yourself out like that."

"Isn't a complete lack of self-awareness the standard for us?"

That comment from Naomasa earned a small smile from the girl. And...

"Did it not get through when I shot the dragon yesterday?"

That froze the atmosphere.

...That...?

The sniper shot had been from a distance. It had come all the way from the evacuated ships watching the Musashi from a distance.

The sniper had to have been ten kilometers away.

...So she made sure it got through, hm?

Her confident tone of voice suggested her firing spells were not about to miss.

Thus, Asama closed the sign frame she had begun a search on. She had

decided it would be more polite to directly ask the girl who she was instead of checking the records of who boarded the Musashi.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Testament." The girl named herself. "I am Suzuki Magoichi. A name inheritor."

Chapter 7: Reporter in an Official Place

第七章

『公的場の報告者』



伝えていて
聞いていて
しかしまとめるのは
そのあとという不思議
配点（報告義務ですからー）

You pass it on

You ask about it

But mysteriously

It isn't all gathered together until later

Point Allocation (Because You are Obligated to Report)

“So Suzuki Magoichi actually showed up.”

There was a nature park in an underground atrium on Murayama.

The person who spoke there was identified by another voice calling over from an ice cream stand.

“Torii, don’t do anything rash.”

“I won’t, Suga. Besides, there’s no way I could win against someone like that.”

That was from Torii who rested her elbows on the stand’s counter and ate an ice cream cone. She wore a girl’s uniform with only a chest band for the top and she looked to Oosuga who was preparing some cream beyond the counter.

“How many wives showed up today?”

“Eleven.”

“It’s amazing that you can actually answer that, Suga. ...Were they all regulars.”

“Two were new faces.”

“Did you check them out?”

“Memorizing the faces of my customers is my most important hobby as a businessman.”

“At least try to hide it.”

“But my hobby is also my job.”

“Ohh,” said Torii with a nod. She then looked around where preparations were underway for the spring school festival. Lanterns were being hung in the park and a uniformed guard would occasionally pass through for security.

When they noticed Torii and Oosuga, they would nod, but when Torii saw that, she looked over at Oosuga.

"So when's the arrest happening?"

"Of my manager, you mean?"

"I see him getting dragged off to the guard station from time to time, so I don't think there's anything to worry about there."

"Then it's you? What in the world did you do? ...No, wait. Don't tell me. I don't want any part of this."

"...Y'know, you sometimes take things even further than me, but could you stop that? Please?"

"I have no idea what you mean, but you'd better pay for what you ate."

"Sure, sure."

Torii stuck a hand in her pocket and then froze in place.

She suddenly removed her side skirt and placed it on the counter.

"Keep the change, Suga."

Oosuga stared at the skirt sitting on the counter.

It was black with white hemming and lining.

"What is this?"

"I don't have any money."

"Again, what is this?"

"You can sell it."

"No, thank you."

Torii frowned at his rejection.

"Why? Musashi's Chancellor and Student Council President just stripped it off. That's sure to be worth a lot."

"Yeah, but it's not from a wife."

"What would you do if it was?"

"Instead of selling it, I would keep it as my personal...no, I mean I would confiscate it."

"Why haven't you been arrested yet...?"

Torii then removed her tail skirt and placed it on the counter.

"Fine, then. You can have the full set."

"So what?"

"Y-you can be cruel sometimes, you know!?"

"Pipe down. Besides, these won't fit in the register."

"Sell them! Were you planning to use them to barter!?"

"How am I supposed to trade some idiot's stripped skirt for money that has been touched by a wife's bare hands?"

"I've kept quiet about this until now, but that is creepy... Really, really creepy..."

Torii took two steps back along the counter and Oosuga glared at her.

"A girl trying to sell her skirt has the nerve to criticize a love of wives?"

"Okay, I'll admit we're both just as bad, so just take my skirt in place of money."

"You do not match my belief system, so that is not valid payment."

"Umm." Torii thought for a bit. "Oh, I get it! So my skirt would be valid payment if I was a wife!"

"So you figured it out. Clever girl. Now go get married."

"No one needs to be your idea of clever, so come on over here and be normal!"

"A normal person wouldn't try to pay for ice cream with her skirt!"

"Then...then what am I!?"

Torii struck a dramatic pose and raised her voice, so everyone in the park

turned their way.

After a pause, some applause began and she bowed.

And then she rested her elbows on the counter again. She also pulled a mic from somewhere.

“So to interview myself, what am I supposed to do about this?”

“About paying for your food?”

“No, not that.” Torii sighed. “Magoichi takes everything so seriously, so she can be such a pain.”

“So you met Suzuki Magoichi’s name inheritor, did you?”

The evening light entered a wooden room. The large and longish room was lined with faculty desks.

This was the faculty room on the first floor of Musashi Ariadust Academy’s front building. Adele had arrived to report to Oriotorai whose seat was at a desk near the entrance.

She was reporting on the mysterious phenomenon job in Okutama’s underground.

Asama had gone to report to the Asama Shrine, Mitotsudaira had gone to the Knight’s League, and...

...As a vassal, I have to report to the academy.

The transport district and warehouse district where the action had occurred were classified as ports that aerial ships could stop at, so they were managed by the Port Management Office which had a transportation official among Musashi’s Public Morals Committee.

Oriotorai and the Asama Shrine had informed the Public Morals Committee about this job in advance and that was why Adele’s group had been given the authority to do the work there.

And now that it was over, they only had to report to Oriotorai and the Asama Shrine who would then submit a formal report to the Public Morals Committee.

...That's more or less how it works.

So Adele opened a sign frame and displayed the route they had taken. It showed where Asama's group and her group had split up in the warehouse district and it showed where they had met Suzuki Magoichi.

"That should about cover it."

"Oh, yes. That's plenty. It matches what Asama submitted, so it should be fine."

Adele could not say that she had actually been given quite a bit of data by Asama.

Of course...

...This homeroom teacher probably knows that...

After all, when Oriotorai reached for the submitted sign frame...

"Hanami's auto-mapping really is incredible... We'll be doing some dungeon training during the summer study camp, so maybe I need to ban Mouse mapping..."

She did not even try to hide it.

But the report itself was complete. And in addition to their witness accounts and reports, Konishi and Masazumi's father had been watching from outside and they had submitted a witness account that no mysterious phenomena had appeared outside.

"That's everything I have to tell you, Sensei."

"You blew up a warehouse and canceled a long block's buffering spell, but it was to get rid of a mysterious phenomenon. It was all to ensure the safety of Musashi's flight. Also..."

Oriotorai picked a plain wooden box up from the desk.

"You also discovered a porn game smuggling warehouse."

"So was it all a net gain or loss?"

"From an official standpoint, a gain." Oriotorai placed the box back on the desk and smiled. "For the Asama Shrine and the academy, this was a lucky

result."

It was a relief to hear a teacher say that.

Thank goodness, thought Adele once more. But...

...There's still a problem.

That was what they had discussed at the Blue Thunder the night before.

The Musashi was surrounded by mysterious phenomena right now.

...A thin film of mysterious phenomena has formed something like a spherical barrier and it causes them to gather and appear without the Musashi detecting it.

From their perspective, it was like they could purify the mysterious phenomena as many times as they wanted, but more of them would show up.

And there was a problem with this incident:

"We never did get any final proof that the mysterious phenomenon was purified."

Hearing that, Oriotorai looked her way and nodded.

"Are you talking about Asama's report from last night about the mysterious phenomena surrounding the Musashi?"

"Judge."

She did not hesitate to nod.

She did not care if it made her seem anxious. Because she was.

"It might come back even after being purified and it's really hard for us to detect. ...Looking at them like that, these mysterious phenomena are a pretty big problem."

"Yes," agreed Oriotorai. "They come from ley line disturbances, so even if you think they're gone, they might have just scattered and will gather back together elsewhere. And you don't know when they do appear because it happens outside of anything the shrines or spell users can detect. In that sense, the term 'purification' seems quite apt."

“The term ‘purification’?”

“Judge. That’s right. I mean, we aren’t erasing or destroying them. We’re wearing them away to make them clean again.”

Adele understood what that meant thanks to all the time she had spent with Asama and Shinto in general.

What was it Shinto would do about a mysterious phenomenon like the one today?

“Instead of ending it by destroying it like the Catholics do, Shinto tries to end it by tuning the ley line it comes from, right?”

“It’s like cleaning up. Even if the mysterious phenomenon has a physical form, there’s no need to defeat it. After all, tuning the ley line will leave it with nowhere to live any longer. ...If you think of the Catholics as using symptomatic therapy, then Shinto uses a complete cure therapy. So...”

Adele knew what Oriotorai was saying, so she finished for her teacher.

“Yesterday’s Hidden Dragon and the Non-God Sword before that were really troublesome.”

Adele saw Oriotorai nod.

“A mysterious phenomenon on that level creates a ‘field’ for itself. They contaminate the area you cleaned up and make it so they can continue living there. ...Of course, the mid-level ones use up all their stamina simply creating the ‘field’, so they are annihilated all on their own. But...”

She opened a sign frame and held it up a little. The pale evening light from the window shined on it, but the diagram on the screen was perfectly visible.

It was...

“This is what Asama sent me last night. ...It’s an estimated diagram of the spherical barrier of mysterious phenomena surrounding the Musashi. It’s been with us since Mikawa and it settled down a bit when you punished it last night, but it can apparently create something like a Hidden Dragon with ease. If that’s true...”

"We'll have to use some symptomatic therapy in addition to complete cure therapy, won't we?"

Adele glanced to the left and right.

There was no one else here. The clubs were not yet done with their activities.

Once she knew no one else was listening, she continued speaking.

"Just so you know, 'Musashi'-san sent a purification request to the Asama Shrine. She wanted them to use the Gagaku Festival to purify it all at once."

But...

"This is Aki...so should we ask the Catholics to do a demon exorcism?"

"It sounds like a good idea to me."

Oriotorai's eyebrows rose and she placed her finger on Asama's diagram. She moved her finger around the three-dimensional image of Musashi and the spherical barrier surrounding it.

"Here and here. And maybe here too. ...I think it could work if they placed Catholic forces at about 16 locations and performed a summoning followed by an exorcism. It would certainly be exciting."

"I see..."

Can I really trust what she says? wondered Adele, but Oriotorai continued regardless.

"Making it exciting is important. K.P.A. Italia has been in a bit of a depression, so letting their warriors battle a dragon would probably improve their national morale. ...I bet the Roman Student Council's Conference Division would send out their Council for Justice and Peace."

"Don't they report directly to the Pope-Chancellor?"

Well, this is their land, so I guess it makes sense. However...

"Would they be able to pull it off after coming all the way out here?"

"They would. Or rather, I bet the Pope-Chancellor would stubbornly make sure they did." Oriotorai spread her mouth horizontally in a smile. "But, Adele, you aren't serious about this, are you?"

"Well, no."

Adele came back to her senses when she immediately replied with a smile.

...Ah.

Not good, not good. She felt like she had been set up with this exchange, but...

...I do wish we could resolve this ourselves.

She felt like that was impossible and she shook her raised hand back and forth.

"That's a pretty dangerous thought. Yes."

After all...

"A second year vassal thinking of resolving an incident that required international-level fighters? I think I've let our victories over the past few days get to my head."

"Really?" Oriotorai closed the sign frame and narrowed her eyes. "I haven't been teaching you so you could let a mid-level dragon get the better of you."

"I don't think egging me on is going to help."

But then something occurred to Adele.

...Huh?

She had a single reason for her confusion and Oriotorai provided it.

"You really did defeat the dragon, though. ...You need to have more confidence in yourself. Otherwise, my job won't seem worth doing," she said. "Also, you'll be third years next year, so you'll be out there on the international stage. Keep that in mind, okay? ...I imagine Asama's group will be preparing for the Gagaku Festival at the Asama Shrine, but what will you be doing after this, Adele?"

"I have my part-time job and Suzu-san will apparently be working at the bathhouse. You guessed right about Asama-san's group, but I think Naito-san and Naruze-san went shopping. ...Oh, and Naomasa-san received an interesting request."

Naomasa sighed as she viewed a sign frame in her room.

Her room was in Takao's underground area.

"Honestly," she said there. "I didn't think I would have preparations to make, too."

She added "what a pain" as she stood on the dirt floor of the small room.

After returning from the mysterious phenomenon hunt and changing at the Asama Shrine, she had returned home for work.

She appreciated that job because it had paid decently. Her god of war, Jizuri Suzaku, was used for work on the Musashi, so she only had to cover a third of the parts and maintenance costs, but...

...It's still pretty expensive.

So she wanted money. And the sign frame in front of her might help there.

"An idea for modifying Naito and Naruze's brooms, hm?"

Even if this was between friends, she was a professional when it came to maintenance and machine work. They understood that, so they had made an official order asking for an estimate and listing the limit of what they hoped to pay.

They had handed her this information on the way back from the previous job.

Tonight, she was not going to participate in the Gagaku Festival the others were holding at the Asama Shrine.

And since they had surreptitiously passed this to her...

...I guess it's supposed to be a secret.

Naomasa did not know how keeping it a secret would help, but she kind of understood why they would want to do so.

Technohexen had a lot of pride. In fact, given their internal hierarchy and history, they could not get by without pride.

The engine division used the services of the delivery businesses which were

primarily run by Technohexen. They would use transport ships and transport systems for large materials, fuel, and lubricants, but it was faster to get a Technohexen for hard copies of diagrams or for small parts.

Based on what she had heard from those Technohexen and from Naito and Naruze, their internal hierarchy was quite strict.

They each had their own turf or had dibs on a certain portion of the work.

“And at the lower ranks, they aren’t allowed to travel between ships for deliveries. It really sounds like a pain.”

Of course, the engine division was much the same.

Newcomers were only allowed to work at one station, but as they gained experience, they could move on to other work on the same ship or floor. And if they gained even more experience, they could move on to work on different ships or floors. Eventually, they would be made the manager of a station they excelled at.

Naomasa was a manager. Taizou, the engine division’s chief, had notified her of that when she entered high school.

But even as a manager, she tended to do more actual work than managing since she had a god of war which could do a lot of work other people could not. Although you could say she was still *effectively* a manager because she was allowed to do the maintenance work she excelled at on each ship.

And since she had reached her current position like that...

“I do somewhat understand that Technohexen environment.”

The broom modification order was primarily to reinforce both their brooms.

That would make the brooms heavier, but it was not a bad idea. Technohexen accelerated using spells. There was only so much acceleration the broom itself could provide, but they just had to control the peak line using the spells.

Technohexen flight started off quite fast, but that was because the reinforced brooms were designed to withstand a lot of speed all at once.

Naito and Naruze were already flying like that.

They had probably already reinforced the brooms using commercial parts. That would be why Edel Brocken had tried to recruit them as testers.

But if they wanted even more reinforcements from Naomasa...

"That probably means adding in a pretty intense acceleration spell."

She continued staring at the sign frame, but then she suddenly moved.

"Oh, it's time."

She grabbed the metal pot hanging on the wall and placed it on the stove installed in the dirt floor.

She had of course modified the tall stove. She had made it more airtight to increase the heating power and she had made sure she could manipulate the air intake. After putting some charcoal inside, she reached for the sign frame.

She was preparing to close it, but...

"Well, whatever."

She left it open and reached her prosthetic arm behind her instead.

The rice inside a container on the tea table had cooled. She dropped it into the pot and then added in some sesame oil and seaweed.

"Oh, whoops."

She frowned and glared at the sign frame.

"I was so distracted I went to the egg ration pickup and forgot to get any. Naito and Naruze probably went to the Blue Thunder, so maybe I can have them bring me some..."

Masazumi met an unexpected customer.

She was in the Blue Thunder. She had gotten to know the manager and automaton there shortly after arriving from Mikawa. That was why she often came here to eat, but there were a few other customers there now. And that included...

"Oh, you come here too, Naito and Naruze?"

"Oh, yes. It's kind of like a friend's place for us."

Naito entered the café and Naruze circled around outside and arrived at the window.

Then someone walked up from the back of the café.

It was P-01s. She bowed toward Naito and Naruze.

"You have guts returning here after what happened last night, Naruga-sama and Nargot-sama."

Hearing that, Naito and Naruze looked to Masazumi.

Masazumi raised her left hand next to her face and averted her gaze.

Chapter 8: Winged Ones Standing Up

第八章

『立ち処の翼有り共』



By the time I noticed it

It had a current

And was sweeping me away

Point Allocation (Others and Myself)

Inside the Blue Thunder, Masazumi saw Naito correct Zwei Fräulein's names for P-01s and then begin placing an order.

After work, they were apparently going to inspect some instruments at the Asama Shrine and then discuss the Gagaku Festival.

...A festival, huh?

This would be Masazumi's first time taking part in Musashi's Spring School Festival and Gagaku Festival.

She was secretly looking forward to it and she turned toward Naito and Naruze who would be performing.

But while Naito was at the counter...

"Naruze, why are you outside?"

"Judge. You can't tell? We're about to head out for work, but my broom's thruster is too big to fit inside the Blue Thunder."

"Yeah, yours is custom made." Naito smiled back toward her partner who was resting her head in her hand in the open window. "But you look cute like this too, Ga-chan."

"I appreciate the 'too'."

This conversation made Masazumi reconsider their relationship. Everyone in their class accepted it as perfectly normal, but from the view of someone from the primarily Far Eastern Mikawa...

...A two-girl couple? It's kind of strange, isn't it?

M.H.R.R. supposedly had a way for two women to have a baby. Masazumi had no idea if that was true, but they would probably hear about it when the

Musashi eventually made its way there.

...The differences between women and men have kind of lost all meaning, haven't they?

When reproducing the Testament descriptions, they needed people who fit the parts, but interpretations were also used. The current trend was to mostly ignore gender altogether, but there was still a general idea that it was best if it matched.

That was the thinking that affected my body, thought Masazumi.

"What's that look for, Masazumi?"

"Eh? Oh, uh, well."

She was not about to mention what she was thinking about them or herself.

Besides, there was ample material for conversation. For example...

"About that commotion earlier. You all really like causing trouble, don't you?"

Naruze's eyebrows rose and Masazumi worried she had upset her, but then the Technohexen gave a snort of laughter.

"It's not that we like causing trouble. Things just tend to get exciting around us. ...Thanks to a certain subset of our class."

...Exciting? Isn't that even more dangerous?

Masazumi thought a bit about her complicated classmates.

But Naruze said nothing more about that topic.

That must have kept her from noticing Masazumi's worries because she looked over to the counter where Naito and P-01s were confirming their order.

Naito held the Magie Figur that Naruze had tossed her earlier.

"And this is a chicken wing. They're really good if you cover them with cornmeal and fry them."

"Judge. So you want me to find a unicorn or octacorn somewhere, defeat it, and make a meal by frying its horn. I did not expect to be asked for an

immortality dish..."

"Um, are you not familiar with corn? Also known as maize?"

"For example?"

Naito thought about P-01s's question and finally...

"It's a rod about 30cm long. Kind of like this handle, I guess? And everything but the part you hold is covered in yellow bumps."

"So something like a fat-legged caterpillar?"

"Hmm, this is surprisingly hard to describe..."

It really is, thought Masazumi as Naruze drew something on a Magie Figur while peering in through the window.

"Are you drawing corn?"

"Eh? Oh, I'm drawing what Margot just described. But..." She frowned and wiped sweat from her brow. "Margot...I drew a picture of that and it looks just like a sex toy."

Don't say that. Don't draw it either. And don't use your image processing tools to give it a curve. Please stop searching the divine network for similar images.

The surrounding customers gave those two odd looks, but a comment of "Oh, it's just the Technohexen" seemed to settle it. *Is that a form of Technohexen persecution? No, I guess not.*

Then Naito spotted something.

"Oh, you have cornbread."

One of the breads lined up behind P-01s had corn kernels kneaded into it.

P-01s looked back.

"Which one?"

"Um, the longish one with a lot of yellow kernels stuck to it."

"Margot...that's..."

Again, don't draw it.

But P-01s seemed to realize what she meant.

“Oh, that one the manager refers to as corm.”

“Is she an airhead?”

Naito looked to the back of the café and the manager must have provided some kind of reaction from the kitchen. Naito nodded a few times.

“Then use some of that corm-meal to fry us some chicken.”

“Judge. Would you like this bread as well?”

“No, no. We’re not here for the bread today.”

“I see.” P-01s looked back at the cornbread. “This is one of our top sellers, but the yellow things come out just as bright the following morning. So why do you all like it so much?”

All of the customers did a simultaneous spit take. And as they all choked or tried to catch their breath, Naruze spoke quietly.

“She really is indiscriminate.”

“Agreed.”

Naito gave Masazumi a look that said “I’m glad I didn’t buy any”, but that was just how it was.

“What is that bread called?”

“Gold Nugget Bread. What about it? ...And yes, I assume that is referring to what happens the following morning.”

Naruze tapped Masazumi’s shoulder and held up a Magie Figur for her to see.

“Why did they hire someone so very challenging?”

It was finger-written, so Masazumi wrote a reply with her finger.

“To make things more exciting, probably.”

Masazumi realized this was her first time using her finger to write on anything like a sign frame since arriving on the Musashi.

It kind of made her happy.

But then Naruze spoke up while watching Naito order more food.

"Masazumi, you had to have known they were selling cornbread."

"Well, it's pretty expensive, so I never really noticed it."

"It's only 200 yen."

"That's two meals."

The Weiss Hexen looked at her like she could not believe her ears, but what was that about?

Is she going to ask me about it? wondered Masazumi and Naruze did indeed ask.

"Why are you here?"

"They give me a good discount on bread that didn't come out right or unsold bread from the previous night."

"So you're basically making deals at the back entrance?"

"I'm a student, so people seem to accept it as me trying to support myself."

Not even she knew how to judge herself on this. But...

"Given who my father is, I have to keep up appearances to a degree."

"Sounds tough."

She just about nodded in agreement, but she resisted the urge.

Protecting her father's name was only natural if she wanted to be a politician. So she stayed silent, but...

...Ah.

She did not know how to respond at times like this.

I can't believe this, thought Masazumi.

Should I just smile? she wondered, but it was too late for that.

So...

"Well, whatever."

“I’ll make a doujinshi out of you.”

“What...!? And why are you acting like that’s a favor!?”

“What’s wrong with it?” Naruze gave her a disinterested look. “The others and I aren’t much better, but I’m fascinated by incomplete people. You never know how they’ll turn out.”

“Are you telling me to question how I should respond?”

“Your value will not be set in stone until you make a decision.”

So...

“And afterwards, you get to decide everything other than that. ...Including the things which have nothing to do with your old man.”

Masazumi thought about what that meant. And she knew what she had to say: “So you’ll draw me no matter what I want, will you?”

“You give me different material each time, so you are a wonderful subject to use. You’re as good as Asama.”

I need to change the subject.

“...Asama is the same?”

I feel bad doing this to Asama, she thought, but she asked anyway.

She also thought it was disrespectful to view them as the same.

“Has Asama not decided what she wants either?”

“Asama has her family and public lives pretty well sorted out. They stand out a lot, but her private life is pretty shaky – maybe that’s why her breasts jiggle so much – and it’s interesting to watch.”

“Is that how it is?”

“That’s how I see it anyway. I don’t want to own my doujinshi subjects; I want to know more about them. That’s why I draw out different patterns in a trial and error attempt to learn more...and a lot of them fall into the error category.”

“Why do you do that?”

“Because I’m pretty bad at interpersonal relationships?”

...She's aware of that!?

That may have been the biggest surprise of the day. *But*, suddenly thought Masazumi.

“Is it better to have made a decision about your private life?”

“Who knows.”

The Technohexen’s answer could be seen as dodging the issue or as an admission of her own ignorance. But she said more while resting her head in her hand at the window.

“I’d like to have some guarantees in my private life if I could. Like social status, organizational status, or income.”

“But it’s better to let the other things change?”

“Well, yeah. If nothing ever changed about your daily meals, your relaxation time, your fashion, or your short-term interests, wouldn’t life be boring? Not even a Technohexen always uses the optimal delivery route and we aren’t always looking directly ahead.”

Masazumi kind of understood what she was saying.

...That’s right.

What was her father like in that regard?

He worked as a politician and, as far as she could tell, he had everything figured out in both his public and private lives.

If that was a prerequisite for being a politician, would she become what Naruze and the others saw as a boring person?

She was not sure.

Was her father a boring person in Naruze and the others’ eyes?

“Okay! Koni-tan, that adlibbed answer was borrrring!!”

In the audiovisual room below the city hall, someone slammed a card down on a table.

Coins clattered on the table as if to oppose it.

"Wh-what!? It's true no one here so much as tittered, but I still have plenty of money, Nobu-tan!"

"Huhhh!? Didn't you know!? Someone who tells a lame joke is doomed to a life of being unfunny! After that, I am revoking your right to try a taste of my latest treasure: this stew left for me by Masazumi! You only have yourself to blame for not challenging me with money in the first place!"

Then the speaker drew a card.

"Now, let me state the next condition."

"Nhh, what is it!?"

"Well." The man looked at the card while sitting in the sofa with his legs crossed. "Sing the OP songs for every divine TV anime that began this spring."

"I-including Alaskan Girl, the OP song for Ivan the Terrible's Alaskan Vacation!?"

"Indeed. Judge, I can sing it!"

The man stood up and swung his arms with a serious look on his face.

"This Russian delicacy is colored salmon pink! Loved by the nobility! Loved by the serfs! Hurry up! If I finish singing it before you, then you lose, Koni-tan!!!"

"Nobu-tan! Nobu-tan! How can you change your behavior at the drop of a hat like that!?"

My dad never changes at all, decided Masazumi.

But she did have a thought about what Naruze had said. Her father and the others like him would come up with strategies to preserve their interests and their politics, but...

...Huh?

Did they really never change?

It was true they did look after their own interests, but...

"Naruze."

"What?"

"Here's what I think."

She gave an interpretation of what she had just thought up.

When she viewed the idea of a politician through the lens of her father and the others, she found an ideal rather than an understanding.

"You said before that you wanted your status and income to be guaranteed and unchanging, right?"

"Judge. What about it?"

"Well." Masazumi nodded and added a "judge". Then she said, "Most likely, even people with public positions aren't satisfied with their status and income." She thought of her father and the others as she spoke. "The people like that see what they have as the bare minimum and they want to move ever higher if they can. So it isn't unchanging. You might call that being greedy or a slave to political power, but I think they find that to be a lot of fun. It isn't boring to them."

"Yessss! I finished singing fiiiiiiirst! You lose, Koni-taaaaaaaaaaan! That's three losses in a row! You hear that!? Three! Losses! In a! Row! Yes, the right arm, the right arm! And lean back! That's it! Three! Losses! In a! Row! Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! ...Oh? Surely Musashi's great merchant isn't going to run away here, Koni-tan."

"I-I accept your challenge! I accept your challenge, Nobu-tan!"

"Ohhhh? Do you have any chance of winniiiing? You're going to set a record with a fourth loss in a rowwww."

That's the ideal, thought Masazumi.

That's the ideal as seen through my father and the others.

They were strict and her father in particular treated her like she was ignorant

and even told her not to become a Musashi politician.

He seemed to think she was lacking and had given up on her.

But she had her own pride.

There was her body, but she had also spent around a dozen years preparing to be a politician.

...So I want to test myself.

Of course, she knew her father would see that as “only” a dozen years and that she was young enough to change course. But...

...The ideal, hm?

Her intent to become a politician had occasionally wavered after leaving Mikawa and coming to Musashi.

She had wondered if she could do it. But...

“Well, that’s the ideal...or maybe you could call it a hope. Even if it is a one-sided hope from someone who’s never experienced it for real.”

That was important.

Even if she sometimes doubted herself, she could continue to aim higher as long as she had that.

...Honestly.

Am I taking my father’s side too much? she wondered as she considered her own words here.

But Naruze gave her a sidelong glance.

“Nicely said.”

The Weiss Hexen laughed quietly through her nose, but it was not a derisive laugh.

And she simply said one thing.

“But if that’s all you have, you’ll only end up the same as your father.”

“I’m aware of that.”

Her father and the others only seemed to be pursuing their own interests, but there might be another side to them and they did dutifully carry out their role as politicians. So...

"I hope I can start with this ideal and then become my own kind of politician."

"I see. ...Sorry, then. I shouldn't have made those assumptions about you."

"You don't need to apologize."

"I'm disgusted by myself."

With that, Naruze faced forward again.

"Margot, are you done yet?"

When she heard that, Naito smiled bitterly in her heart.

...Ga-chan's pretty embarrassed.

When Naruze felt a certain kind of awkward embarrassment, she would always turn the topic toward Naito. Based on the bits and pieces of the conversation Naito had heard, Naruze seemed to have gone too far in a discussion about Masazumi.

Naruze had trouble with shared secrets like that. Or she just really did not like them.

So she would work to understand other people. Her doujinshi work was a part of that. She would also just go for a joke sometimes. No, she went for the joke more often once she was comfortable with someone. *Like Asama-chi!*

But she was still not comfortable with Masazumi who had only arrived a month and a bit ago.

So when her distance from someone else quickly shrank, she would look away, as if to provide a sense of distance. And Naito felt happiness rather than superiority in knowing that diverted gaze would turn toward her.

"Hmm, just a little longer."

Once she told Naruze that, she heard a sigh behind her.

"I see."

That was the end of it. There was no "hurry up" or "never mind then".

It did seem a little too quick, but...

...She isn't dependent on me. If anything, she's leaning toward me.

Naito and Naruze were the same in that regard.

They were leaning.

They should have been standing straight, but due to their complex circumstances and what they lacked, they ended up leaning.

They were off balance.

But Naito thought that most people were like that.

Who was standing straight?

...That's right.

A name came to mind, but it belonged to a special case. There was no comparison there.

So she decided they were right to be leaning.

They were the slanted Zwei Fräulein. So when they grew unstable, the partner leaning toward them would act as a support, so they could reach out a hand and right themselves.

This was the same. When Naruze suddenly felt a lot closer to Masazumi, that weight increased her slant, so she reached out toward Naito.

She had been on the verge of falling over, so she supported herself and pushed herself back up to her usual position.

And when she did, Naito became aware of her own slant and used Naruze's push to right herself as well.

They both leaned toward each other and they remained standing side by side.

That was why they were Zwei Fräulein.

...This is how it always is, isn't it?

Naito nodded a few times in her heart. *I lean on Ga-chan a lot, too.*

It was mutual.

With that in mind, she placed another order. And...

"You have plum jam? I could probably make some improvised plum liquor with that, so add a jar of that. ...And lastly, can I get some of this gratin? It can be harsh once it gets cold."

"Judge. What would you like to drink?"

"No, no." Naito held her broom up toward P-01s. "That would be too heavy."

"I see. But the Blue Thunder does serve a portable powdered drink that uses ninja technology."

"Ho ho?"

Naito gave her an "I'm listening" look, so P-01s pulled a few glasses and water bottles out from below the counter. Then she pulled something like a chartula from the shelf behind her and held it up.

"Are you ready?"

"Go on."

Naito heard chairs moving behind her. Everyone was focused on them.

Everyone's eyes were on the chartula that P-01s held. Naito knew that, but she could not shake the feeling that they were looking at her.

She felt a little nervous, but the automaton remained calm.

She did not hesitate to pour the contained powder into the glass.

There was a surprising amount of it.

"That's a lot."

"Judge. Research is still underway, but this seems to be the perfect amount."

She then dumped water inside.

Instead of pouring it, she turned the bottle upside down so it fell forcefully

into the glass.

“Ohh, how dynamic.”

“It eliminates the need to stir it. ...There, that should do it.”

She now had a glass filled 80% of the way with a clear liquid.

...Umm.

Naito feared she would have to drink this, so she looked up at the automaton.

“Just a moment.”

P-01s prepared another set of the same thing and dumped water in this glass as well.

She now had two drinks prepared and they each grabbed one. P-01s lightly raised hers and clinked it against Naito’s.

“Cheers.”

They drank it.

...Margot just went along with it and drank it. I hope she'll be all right.

Naruze looked in through the window to see how the two at the counter reacted.

They both drank the full glass.

Margot stopped a few times to check on something, but she soon started back up.

Once they had drained the glasses, they set them down. They thunked solidly against the wooden counter.

“Now, what do you think, Margot-sama?” asked P-01s. “This is Powdered Water. ...Just add water and it becomes water.”

Naruze froze in place when she heard that.

After a while, Margot turned back toward the others and lowered her hands. And on the count of three, she raised them again.

“What’s the point of that!?”

That’s incredible, thought Masazumi.

She watched as P-01s bowed deeply toward everyone. She then raised her empty glass.

“It took a lot of work to create something this superb.”

“...Um, P-01s, can water even *be* powdered?”

“What are you talking about, Masazumi-sama? This is a product named Powdered Water, not water.”

“...Then what was that you dissolved in there just now?”

P-01s calmly nodded.

“Water.”

“That’s the same thing!”

P-01s answered her reflexive *tsukkomi* with a thumbs up.

“Margot,” said Naruze. “You should probably go throw up.”

“Hmm, Ga-chan, I feel like it’s too late for that to help, so how about we get to work for a change of pace?”

“You have a very positive outlook, Naito-sama.”

They were too incredible. At any rate, Naito had finished placing her order.

“I know you two have work to do, but what are you doing after that?”

“Judge. Hold a meeting at Asama’s place about the Gagaku Festival. I mean, ‘Musashi’ asked us to purify the mysterious phenomena, so we have to decide what to do about that,” explained Naruze. “But they’re probably busy, so...”

At that point, the door opened and someone walked in.

She had four gold wings. She wore a red Tres Español track suit with a Far Eastern skirt of the same color.

Naruze spoke her name.

"Marine... What are you doing here?"

Naito confronted Marine in the Blue Thunder.

Masazumi sat by the window, P-01s stood behind the counter, and Naito sent some text to Naruze.

"This is going to be trouble if we get into a fight, Ga-chan."

"I love how you don't deny that."

She nodded in agreement instead of sending more text and she slid one step to the left of the counter.

Marine was in the Blue Thunder, so she was probably a customer. They had their issues, but it would be best not to keep the woman from that.

And Marine moved up to the counter.

"Um..."

Marine must have decided to order something because she turned to face the counter.

And in that instant, P-01s spoke.

"You are a new face around here."

"Eh? Oh, judge."

"I have two things to tell you about: something awful and an unavoidable fate."

...Is this a new version?

Naito glanced to the window where Masazumi was hiding her face with a hand and looking the other way. Naruze was her usual self: holding up a Magie Figur saying "keep going".

But as Marine gave a puzzled look, P-01s placed a glass and a bottle on the counter. She poured a powder into the glass and dumped the bottle's water in after it.

"All done. Please, have a drink."

Marine clearly looked around at the others, so Naito wordlessly moved her left hand.

She stroked the rim of her glass on the counter to show Marine it was empty.

Either Marine decided that meant it was safe or she wanted to accept the challenge.

“...Thank you.”

She lifted the glass in both hands and chugged it.

After gulping down about half of it, her eyebrows rose.

“Oh? This is really good water.”

She then started drinking the second half.

And P-01s nodded.

“It is supposed to be coffee.”

Marine spat it out.

Naito thought to herself while watching the four-winged descended angel choke.

...Was this café always so novel?

But P-01s spoke calmly to choking Marine.

“Then I will start with the awful thing.”

“Eh!? That wasn’t part of your routine?”

“Judge. You look like you would want one of the leftovers meals...no, one of the unsold You Damn Chicken meals from this morning, but they sold out just a bit ago. That is very unfortunate.”

“No, I wasn’t hoping for...”

“You are a bird, yet you hate chicken?”

“No, I didn’t say I hate it...”

Ah, realized Naito.

...Going along with it is dangerous.

She wanted to warn the woman, but it was too late. P-01s nodded and calmly stared at Marine.

"Listen. If you like chicken, then why are you not devastated to find the morning leftov-...the You Little Chicken meals have sold out?"

The product name had changed a little, but pointing that out would only get Naito involved. She belatedly started pretending she was trying to choose some bread while she listened in on the conversation.

"Naito-sama and Naruze-sama were chowing down on chicken last night, but you seem to be different. You appear to hate it. Is that the case? The end."

"Eh!? That's it!?"

Hearing Marine's exclamation, Naito looked over at Naruze who had written "avant-gard" on a Magie Figur. *She misspelled it, so maybe she could stand to use a Hexagone Française battle setting for some of her doujinshis*, she decided.

"Now for the unavoidable fate."

"What might that be...?"

P-01s nodded.

"I have just completed a leftov-...reduced price You Damn Pig meal."

"And what is that...?"

"As you hate chicken, I concluded you must like pork."

If you said anything, you lost. If you mentioned that beef, horse, and lamb existed, she would probably have that ready for you the next time you showed up.

But Marine...

"Um, I don't really like pork all that much..."

"Then why are you even at this café?" P-01s's eyes widened and she took a half step back. "Now, which will it be: chicken or pork?"

This assumption of only two options is kind of amazing, thought Naito.

But then something occurred to her.

"I thought you didn't have any chicken left."

"Oh, dear. I am so very careless." P-01s placed a paper package in front of Marine. "Here is your You Damn Pig meal. That will be 350 yen."

Naruze spoke up while watching Marine pay for the meal with her head and shoulders lowered.

"You really have to get the employees on your side at this café, Masazumi..."

"I think I have to agree, but I'm only now realizing how lucky I was..."

"In a way, you actually feel like you did something wrong, so it really is an incredible place."

...If only the main one was always open.

That said, she did enjoy the lively atmosphere here.

Then Marine looked her way with meal in hand.

And she suddenly spoke.

"You seem to be preparing for a battle."

This is a trick question, thought Naruze.

...She's trying to see whether or not we've started our battle preparations yet.

The question was also meant to see if the preparations were for a battle against Marine.

But it was a trick. After all...

...She only said "preparing for a battle".

It lacked a lot of information like who they had asked for help, when they would be done, and what they had asked to have done.

The vague question was meant to fit most any situation, so it was meant to draw out additional information from the people familiar with the situation.

So Naruze answered immediately.

“Don’t be silly. We’ve long since finished our preparations. You can challenge us at any time.”

In fact...

“We can do it here and now if you want.”

That was pretty good, Ga-chan, thought Naito.

But they had never expected for Marine to show up here.

Marine had declared war just the day before.

It was a little much to ask about their preparations so soon afterwards.

...But it is true we’ve begun our preparations.

Their request to Naomasa would probably take about three days to complete.

The reinforcements to their brooms would make them heavier, but it would allow them to withstand rapid acceleration and braking.

And Marine was a high-speed type.

Strengthening their brooms’ acceleration would give them an advantage there.

But, thought Naito.

...I’m pretty sure that answer didn’t leave any openings.

“Ga-chan, that was well done.”

“I hope you’re right.”

Naruze’s answer had seemed to reveal their hand but actually dodged the issue.

After all, they couldn’t exactly fight inside the café even if their preparations were complete.

So she had added the “here and now” to leave it a mystery whether they really were prepared.

That was the point of it, so...

“The festival is coming up soon,” said Naito.

Once that began, there would be plenty of locations suitable for a battle.

“Let’s fight it out at an appropriate place during the festival.”

Chapter 9: Player at the Shrine

第九章

『境内の遊び屋』



も、もう
困ったものですね
配点（ノリノリじゃないですか）

O-oh, c'mon

Quit doing that

Point Allocation (You love it, don't you?)

A rectangular section of sky was visible.

That stealth barrier sky was generally white, but it was dyed a pale red as evening fell.

A shrine with a two-level roof was located below that sky. Gravel and a torii sat in front of that. This was...

“The Asama Shrine... It’s been a while since it felt so far away.”

“Heh heh. Isn’t that because you’ve never been carrying all that when visiting before?”

Two people exchanged words there. One was Kimi and the other was Mitotsudaira who sat on the stairs to the main shrine building. She looked in the direction Kimi pointed, and...

“Well, yes, I did think it was an awful lot.”

There was a pile of musical instruments on the side of the stairs. A double digit number of them were stacked up in their cases.

“It looks like we’re preparing for a huge orchestra. We need to put them in order once Asama gets back.”

Mitotsudaira could only lower her shoulders at that.

...Maybe I got too worked up.

The Cerberus on her head barked, but she was not sure if the creature was agreeing with her or critiquing her.

However...

“This was necessary, wasn’t it?”

These instruments were for them and for Naito and Naruze. Also...

“We couldn’t make any noise in the storeroom... Since we have to check on

them here, we brought back three promising-looking ones each, so of course it ended up being such a ridiculous amount."

"We should have put them in the storeroom below the Asama Shrine."

"We would still have to carry them up to test them. And even if we did that, it would have to be after we selected them. Also, above and below makes little difference after coming so far."

"You really do take things seriously, Mitotsudaira."

"I suppose it's just my personality..."

With that, Mitotsudaira looked back to the pile of instruments.

She had chosen a few string instruments and plucked keyboards, Kimi had chosen some drums and guitars, Asama had gone for *biwas*, and Naito and Naruze had focused on guitars.

They had all carried their own first candidate themselves, but Mitotsudaira had carried the rest. Of course, she had not carried them on her back. She had strung them from a support scaffolding pillar she had found in the storeroom.

Kimi had said she looked like a peddler, but her wares were far too rare. She was glad the Spring School Festival preparations had been underway on her way from the long block lift to here.

...I would have stood out too much otherwise.

She had been able to blend in with Persona-kun, who had been carrying around a pole strung with a lot of buckets containing goldfish, and Noriki, who had been carrying lumber.

Even if they were only musical instruments, their average weight was nearly 10kg when the case was included. With a total of around fifteen of them, it was a lot of work even for a Loup-Garou like Mitotsudaira.

She had strength, but it used up a lot of stamina when she had to use it constantly instead of in quick bursts.

But it would have been a lot better without the final stretch up the Asama Shrine's steps.

The problem was the Asama Shrine's structure, forcing them to descend from the surface to four stories belowground and then climb a story's worth of stairs back up to it.

After the four flights of stairs down put you at ease, the one flight back up supplied a finishing blow.

"That was rough..."

"The stairs?"

"Judge. Just when you think you've arrived, those stairs get you. It's honestly absurd that the Asama Shrine doesn't have an elevator to reach it from below."

"You say that, but this shrine was built by licensed shrine carpenters who carried all the materials up themselves. The gods must really like making people go to extra effort in their territory."

Kimi then added a "but".

She took a long stride with a light step and placed her hand on Mitotsudaira's right shoulder.

"Did it leave a bruise? If so, you should get it looked at."

"By Tomo when we bathe in the spring?"

"Heh heh. ...You could get my foolish brother to do it, too."

"I-I have no idea what you mean!"

Mitotsudaira just about imagined the scene on reflex, but she caught herself. And as an excuse for cutting off her thoughts...

"Besides, my king can't use any healing spells."

That had to be true. If not, the incident with him being beaten to a nudist bloody pulp in middle school would not have happened.

Of course, it was possible he had learned some afterwards, but she had at least heard nothing of the sort from Kimi or Asama.

"So..."

Just as she tried to say this had nothing to do with him...

"Expecting actual healing isn't the only reason to let someone see your injury or exhaustion, you know?"

"Eh?"

"Silly girl." The busty girl stared down at her face from above. "If you let him see, my foolish brother will at least say something like 'you've been working hard, haven't you?'"

Her impression of his voice was so good it made Mitotsudaira's heart pound.

Mitotsudaira groaned, the Cerberus barked, and the idiot sister used that opening to speak.

"Listen. When you show him, you can't be showing it off. You have to act natural and say it doesn't really bother you."

"B-but if I do that..."

She wanted to somehow change the subject, so she tried to end the current one.

"If I act natural and say it doesn't bother me, won't he just accept that and not worry about it?"

"Oh?" Kimi smiled bitterly. And, "He would notice the truth. ...Don't you think?"

Mitotsudaira thought, *That's not a fair question.*

When pressed to choose one answer or the other, she would have to choose one.

"...You're right."

"See?" Kimi bent down a little. "Let's say my foolish brother asks you what kind of bruise it is."

It was a ridiculous thought. If he asked her that...

"I would tell him not to worry about it. Obviously."

"Then he would ask if it was from that battle."

He would, realized Mitotsudaira.

...He wouldn't think it was from carrying instruments...

If she had been injured recently, anyone would assume it was from the mysterious phenomena purification battles against the Non-God Sword and Hidden Dragon. But...

"I wouldn't want him worrying about me, so I would honestly tell him it was from carrying instruments."

"Would you? Then would you have him reward you for it?"

"N-no. This is to prepare for something we want to do. I don't need any kind of reward."

"Really?" Kimi smiled. "What songs'll you be playing? How'll you be singing? How're you preparing the stage? How much have you practiced? What's your song like, Nate? And..."

She mimicked his voice for all of it. And to finish it off...

"I can't wait to see it."

"-----"

That made Mitotsudaira imagine it.

...Ahh.

The heat rising from her neck into her cheeks came from the person in her imagination. She had no idea what would happen if he said that for real. And...

"Oh, Mitotsudaira. You just want to sit at his feet, rub your cheek against him, and tell him to look forward to it even more, don't you? You wish he would give you an order like 'fetch', but since he won't, you're just so happy he's thinking about you. And that teasing is about to make you pee yourself!"

"You didn't have to take this in that direction!!"

That calmed her down a bit.

But what *would* happen?

"Will my king come to the Gagaku Festival?"

"Do you really think he wouldn't?"

"But," said Mitotsudaira. "You said he's trying to win over another girl."

"Oh, dear. Silly girl."

"But..."

How would she react if he came to the Gagaku Festival with that girl?

Would she feel like something else had come between the two of them?

She felt despicable.

She chastised herself for feeling so shocked that other people did not do exactly what she wanted them to. But...

"That would mean we only play supporting roles."

"Let me say it again: Silly girl."

"Wh-what makes me so silly?"

"I'm saying," said Kimi, "that you already have a decent position...or rather, role."

"...Huh?"

Kimi raised a finger toward her and first pointed at herself.

"I am his sister. And you are..."

"His knight."

"So you do understand." Kimi spoke through her thinly smiling lips. "You are the only one that can take the leading role as his knight. In everyday life and both on and off duty, you just have to stay with your king as his knight. Even if I or a lover are there too, you have nothing to fear. There is no replacement for a king's knight."

So...

"If you're worried about your relationship with your king while singing, then you only need to sing as his knight."

"_____"

Mitotsudaira was left dumbfounded when she realized what Kimi meant, but the other girl was not done yet.

"Yes, and a knight can of course use combination techniques to confirm the trust between herself and her king. Once you're finished singing as a cute puppy knight, you can beg him to praise you, accept his reward in your mouth, lick and swallow as much as you want, and then get on top to..."

"Again, don't take this in that direction!"

"Well, anyway, a knight does have the right to do that kind of thing."

The frightening part was how Kimi made it sound like she was scolding her.

But if Mitotsudaira ignored the part where Kimi went too far, she understood what the girl was trying to say.

"You're saying to keep my eyes on our relationship, aren't you?"

"Judge. The rest is up to my foolish brother, but there is a part that is up to both of you."

"Why?"

"Because what a king is capable of is created by those around them. ...The more you act as his knight, the more he will be protected, the surer his footing will be, and the deeper he will treat you as his knight."

Also...

"Even if my foolish brother sets someone aside, he will not forget what truly matters to them. If you have your position with him, then it means that position lets you remain by his side. Trust in that fact."

She just about nodded in understanding, but she stopped herself.

If she did that here, Kimi was liable to take this in an odd direction again. So she shut her eyes, raised her nose, and...

"I have no idea what you are talking about."

"Oh?" Kimi moved away and smiled a little. "But it was something incredibly important for the future I'm imagining."

"Huh?"

This time, Mitotsudaira really did have no idea what Kimi was talking about.

...The future?

What are you bringing up all of a sudden?

But the idiot sister apparently had no intention of saying any more. She simply moved away from Mitotsudaira and stood on the gravel. She then removed her side skirts, tail skirt, and the stomach of her inner suit.

“I need to go take care of my usual training.”

“Is it something for a substitution?”

“Judge. I could use my role in the mysterious phenomena purification as a substitution, but I can’t hold back since I need this for my dancing.”

With that, she naturally spread her legs atop the gravel.

She rolled her heels across the gravel, but since the gravel was not shoved aside, it must have been some kind of martial art.

...She takes these things to such ridiculous levels...

Mitotsudaira could not emulate that level of balance. After spreading her legs a full 180 degrees, Kimi leaned her body forward.

“Oh?”

But then she raised her head.

She looked starboard where the Asama home was.

Mitotsudaira also looked over and saw someone leaving the building while still wearing a shrine maiden outfit.

“Tomo... Did you finish reporting to your father?”

“Oh, yes.”

Asama nodded toward Mitotsudaira while switching her sign frame from document and report mode to everyday duties mode. “I reported on what just happened along with the other material I had put together. Reporting it all to IZUMO Kitsuki is my dad’s job.”

With that, she looked to the other two.

Mitotsudaira and Kimi had already changed back into their uniforms and Mitotsudaira looked a little tired. Asama had known it would be tough carrying the instruments here and she had come up with another way, but Mitotsudaira had insisted she carry them.

Is she still dragging around what happened in the past? wondered Asama. But...

...She should have gotten over that already.

A lot had happened and it had led to Mitotsudaira returning to normal, but...

...She might have picked up a habit of forcing herself to do things.

In that case, that was who she was now.

If that was what she wanted to do, letting her would be easiest for her. Asama felt no desire to fix her or force her, so if she was to be worried about anything...

“Is your shoulder all right? Do you have a bruise?”

“Eh!? N-no, I’m perfectly fine! Y-yes, just fine!”

“Could you sound any less convincing...?”

Meanwhile, Kimi twisted her body atop the gravel and smiled.

“She’s fine. Right, Mitotsudaira?”

“Kimi, is this your doing...?”

“Ha ha. Silly girl. It’s not about me. It’s about Mitotsudaira and her future.”

Kimi twisted toward Asama and then leaned her body forward. She placed her breasts on the gravel and squished them below her body.

“An injury leads to a reward. That’s just how knights work, isn’t it?”

“I have no idea what you mean...” Asama opened a sign frame. “It’s six, so I’ll be closing the barrier. Is that okay?”

“Heh heh. Why wouldn’t it be? Mitotsudaira and I have the same divine protection pass as my foolish brother, don’t we?”

"Well, yes, you do."

...They really act like this is their second home, don't they?

With an exasperated sigh, Asama lightly clapped her hands.

Instantly, a wind-like temperature difference raced toward her from between her hands.

Instead of a chill, it was like having a cold blade lightly carve into her body. It was a form of purification, and...

...That was the sign for the security barrier.

The clap that set up the barrier reverberated out as she spoke.

"Okay, that generally makes sure no one can get in or out. Now no one on the outside can see us."

Asama saw Mitotsudaira's shoulders relax.

The Asama Shrine's stealth barrier was a projected one, so everyone on the outside could see a standard image of the shrine, but they could not see or hear what was really on the inside. It was like surrounding the shrine with a curtain bearing a drawing of the shrine.

It also allowed those on the inside to see out and it used several divine protections for defense and surveillance.

Mitotsudaira probably felt the same comfort as closing the door to her room.

Meanwhile, Asama still wore her shrine maiden outfit from the battle and she began managing the barrier from the center of the shrine grounds.

...This should be enough.

A shrine was supposed to be a safe place anyone could escape to at any time and it was a noncombat holy ground due to being in the presence of a god. You might receive some kind of punishment, but everyone was generally welcome. Or that was how it was supposed to work.

"But we do a lot of management for the Musashi..."

"I do always think that sounds like a lot of work," said Kimi while she straightened up and twisted herself even tighter for her training.

She used a towel to stretch her arms.

"Isn't there always more work to be done?"

"There is. So most of the work we receive during the day is dealt with in the shrine at night. And a lot of it is related to managing the Musashi as a whole and not just the Shinto contracts, so it requires a lot of data processing."

Hanami had appeared next to her face and was already starting on that work.

Uzy was poking out from Kimi's cleavage and she was clearly interested in Hanami. Those two were a lot like sisters, but Uzy probably wanted to play.

However...

"You can't, Uzy. Your job is to dance and play, but Hanami is doing some other work right now, so you can't get in her way."

"Too bad."

After saying that, Uzy's eyes stopped on something else.

Mitotsudaira was lining up the instruments on rush mats in front of the shrine, but Uzy's focus was on the Cerberus on her head.

...Umm.

Asama looked back and forth between Uzy and the top of Mitotsudaira's head.

"...?"

The three-headed wolf seemed to notice Uzy looking at her.

"!"

The Cerberus barked and Uzy quickly hid behind Kimi's head.

...Oh, dear.

Is she afraid? wondered Asama, but Kimi smiled bitterly.

"My, oh, my. You sure scare easy."

"I think you could learn a thing or two from her, Kimi."

Kimi smiled bitterly as Uzy stood on her head like a dog.

Kimi was taller than Mitotsudaira, so...

"Heh hehn."

Uzy seemed to feel more comfortable now. And the Cerberus's barking sounded a bit like she wanted to play. And that may have been why, "Go on and play."

Mitotsudaira lowered the Cerberus to the ground.

Seeing that, Asama looked to Kimi, wondering how Uzy would respond.

But Uzy shook her head. She looked down at the Cerberus just once, but she frantically shook her head again.

"Work."

Kimi exploded with laughter.

"She's being considerate to Hanami."

"Looks that way."

In her own way, Uzy had seen that Hanami was taking her work seriously and had decided she should not start playing without her. But then she could not grant the Cerberus's desire to play. So...

"Hanami, let Uzy handle your heat reduction. ...And Mito, hand the Cerberus over here."

"Oh, yes. What are you going to do?"

"Heh heh. Just a small dance. You help, too."

"Eh?"

In front of Mitotsudaira, Kimi placed Uzy on top of the Cerberus.

The rest was simple. Uzy's dance was synchronized with Hanami's heat reduction setting.

"Okay, Uzy, start dancing. And the Cerberus, um..."

"C'mon, over here, over here."

Kimi took a light step and let the towel she held flutter just above the gravel.

"...!"

With Uzy on her back, the Cerberus dashed toward the towel.

"Oh, she's surprisingly fast."

"In fact, I think this is the first time I've seen her run a long distance..."

Mitotsudaira's tone was an amusing mixture of dumbfounded and somewhat disappointed.

"Tomo, why are you smiling?"

"No reason. But the Cerberus knows you're her owner. And..."

After chasing after it for a bit, the Cerberus finally managed to bite at Kimi's towel. The three-headed wolf swung the cloth around for a bit, but finally ran back over to Mitotsudaira with it.

Uzy was swung around in a 180 degree turn on top of the beast.

"Oh, oh, oh."

She forced her body into a spin and danced. And that became a substitution between Mice.

"Hanami?"

"It's reducing."

The ether light floating around Hanami changed from a heated yellow to a bluish-white. Things were calming down. Meanwhile, the Cerberus handed the towel to Mitotsudaira.

"U-umm?"

...Mito really isn't used to this kind of thing...

She probably can't do it, thought Asama as she tried speaking to Mitotsudaira.

"Mito, think back to when you were little and play with them like that."

"Eh?" said Mitotsudaira. "When I was little!?"

"Hee hee. Honey? Look, I was cleaning and I came across this picture from when Nate was little. Look at this. When I would sing, she would try to dance but ended up just wiggling her butt around. And we didn't have an inner suit that fit her right back then, so she was only wearing the hard point parts with a towel wrapped around her. She liked playing with the towel and would swing it around, but I think she was trying to copy how I danced."

"Yes, I still did so much for her back then."

"Hee hee. Oh, that girl. She preferred being wrapped in a towel to a diaper, so she really was a little wolf."

Asama realized Mitotsudaira had become entirely useless.

She must have pressed some unpleasant switch from the girl's past.

The silver wolf hung her head with her mouth spread horizontally while blankly immersing herself in something even darker than the evening. Seeing that, Asama wanted to say something helpful.

...U-umm.

"Mito? C-c'mon, if you don't play with the towel, the Cerberus and Uzy can't..."

"!"

A bark from the Cerberus seemed to revive her master from her melancholy about the past.

She gasped, but...

"P-play with the towel!?"

"Eh? ...That's what you're focusing on?"

Mitotsudaira responded to that with an "ah".

She quickly waved her hands back and forth.

"N-no, um, when you say 'play with' it, what exactly do you mean?"

Kimi smiled and mimed placing a towel between her legs and rubbing it back and forth on her crotch, but the crazy person did not matter. *You don't have to mime slapping it over your shoulder too. And I guess it's a testament to her skill as an entertainer that I can imagine the scene so vividly.*

However, the Cerberus moved.

But not for the towel; for Mitotsudaira's hair.

"Eh?"

The Cerberus was always on top, so the bottom of the five large rolls must have been a rare sight.

The three-headed wolf chased her master's hair and tried to jump up at it.

"Ah."

Mitotsudaira lightly spun around to keep the hair out of reach.

But the Cerberus made a dash with Uzy dancing on her back.

Mitotsudaira twisted around some more as she was chased and followed.

"Toh."

She spun and spun.

"Like this?"

She hopped a bit. Then the Cerberus kicked off the gravel in a jump. And of course...

...She can't reach her.

But that was why this counted as "playing".

"Heh heh. You've created a nice flow there." Kimi nodded at Mitotsudaira and lightly grabbed her own hair so the other girl could see. "Your hair probably looks like a tail."

"Yes, it probably does."

"A three-headed wolf pursuing five tails. ...That certainly is a strange sight."

But Asama knew what she needed to say now that the wolf and Cerberus had gotten the hang of this game.

"With a dog or any animal with a strong desire to serve its master, when they're fulfilling a task given to them by their master, don't they see it as a game?"

"That's right." Kimi twisted around on the gravel as she responded. "When they are successful, their master will give them food and praise them. That master-servant relationship is what they want. So you mustn't misunderstand: we might see it as a simple game, but they see it as a confirmation of that relationship, so, Mitotsudaira, you can't just continue escaping. You have to reward her properly afterwards."

"Th-this isn't easy...!"

Due to their difference in size, Mitotsudaira could easily escape if she wanted to.

But that would simply prove to the Cerberus that she was no match for her master.

...That isn't a master-servant relationship.

Mitotsudaira understood what that meant, so she spoke to the others.

"That would be a submissive relationship, wouldn't it?"

"But if you go easy on her, it will mean you are looking down on Troiko. You will turn that three-headed wolf into a pet that doesn't realize she's being toyed with."

"Then I just have to change the type of challenge."

Mitotsudaira jogged forward a bit, looked back, and made a turn to get the Cerberus to chase after her. Then she suddenly let the towel she held dance in front of the Cerberus's face.

"!"

The Cerberus naturally bit at it, but Mitotsudaira pulled it back.

...Oh, dear.

Mitotsudaira threw the towel so the Cerberus could see. She then pointed at the towel and gave the Cerberus a command.

“Vas-y...!”

“!!”

Asama saw the Cerberus dash toward the towel.

The wolf ran in a dancing way and worked to follow after her target.

With Uzy dancing on top of her, the three-headed wolf chased the towel while her feet sounded quietly on the gravel. And just as the towel fell...

“Ohh.”

She bit at it and turned around.

She did not bark. She simply let Uzy pull the towel back up and returned to Mitotsudaira.

Her master spread her arms to welcome her.

“U-umm? How am I supposed to reward her...?”

“Heh heh. Aren’t you getting a little ahead of yourself? Are you going to reward her after every little game? You should play with her more and wait until she’s starting to wonder when the reward is coming.”

“That’s right,” agreed Asama as she operated a sign frame. She accessed the Asama Shrine’s divine transmission store and paid for something herself. “Mito, to celebrate your new relationship, I bought some Mouse snacks and sent them to your hard point parts. You can pull them out from the hip ones.”

“Judge,” said Mitotsudaira with a nod as she took the towel from the Cerberus. The three-headed wolf continued wagging her tail without sitting down, so she seemed to want to play some more. So when Mitotsudaira threw the towel again...

“...!”

The Cerberus dashed away again with Uzy riding her.

Asama was aware of the smile that scene put on her lips, but she also had a thought.

...What is that Cerberus really?

Its appearance had likely used a Greek mythology “mold” from the Kojima Peninsula as well as the ether within the Musashi. But in that case...

...I wouldn't think she would get along with Mito so well...

“Molds” of a mythological being tended to prefer that land itself. They were originally from that land and they had become a guardian deity for it.

But since this one was playing with Mitotsudaira like this...

“She clearly views Mito as her master.”

“Yes, she does. Even when I try to play with her, she always focuses on Mitotsudaira in the end. And since she seems to belong to Mitotsudaira...”

Kimi faced Mitotsudaira with a pale look.

“Is she your secret child...!?”

“You saw her appear!!”

That was true. But in that case...

“Kimi might not be all that wrong about this Cerberus.” Asama put her theory to words. “She may have used Mito’s emotions or something else for a portion of her ‘mold’.”

...Used my emotions or something else for a portion of her “mold”?

Mitotsudaira tilted her head at that.

“What does that mean?”

“Heh heh heh. You don’t get it!? The ‘mold’ of your boobs leaked out and became Troiko! Ahhn, but it’s too bad! She worked so hard to get out, but she’s so small! You only had tiny boobs, so Troiko ended up tiny too! It’s all your fault!!”

Now you’re just being ridiculous.

Anyway, Asama waved her hands back and forth to say that was not the case. That was hardly surprising, but it was still a relief to hear it from Musashi’s

Shinto representative.

So Mitotsudaira ignored the idiot sister and asked Asama a question.

“Tomo, what does this mean?”

“Well, Mito, that Cerberus appeared when you were operating the extractor. I think it helped that we were near the Kojima Peninsula, but you too provide a wolf ‘mold’. So I suspect the two effects combined and created her.”

“...But what exactly is my ‘mold’?”

Kimi slid her hands straight up and down in front of her own chest, but Mitotsudaira pretended not to see it. Trying to figure out what she meant was a bad idea.

Asama seemed to reach the same conclusion because she faced to the side so she could not see Kimi.

“Umm.”

While Asama thought, Kimi gently slid over. Asama responded by turning further around.

“To put it simply...”

“Tomo! Tomo! You have your back turned!”

The towel returned to her, so she swept it around a few times and then threw it.

Asama then turned all the way around. The idiot sister must have been satisfied because she resumed stretching next to her.

And Asama looked back and forth between Mitotsudaira and the running Cerberus.

“Mito, are you letting some stress build up?”

“Huh!?”

Kimi made a move where she seemed to tightly hold her own chest, but Mitotsudaira ignored her.

However, Asama wrinkled her brow as if she did not entirely understand it

herself.

"We were extracting stagnations there. So, Mito, if you were worrying about something or had lost confidence about something, that could have become a 'mold'."

"Is that how it works?"

If so, thought Mitotsudaira as she crouched down toward the creature approaching with towel in mouth.

She took the towel, but the Cerberus wanted to play some more. So she tied a knot in the towel and threw it higher but a little farther than before.

...That Cerberus...

"Is she mine?"

"That I'm not entirely sure about. But even if so, it means the Cerberus simply used a 'mold' inside you; she is not a piece of you that came off. So there's no reason to despair."

"My chest! You think this is about my chest, don't you!?"

"But," suddenly said Kimi. "You know what this means, don't you? If it was enough to create a 'mold', it must be something quite substantial inside you."

"Huh?"

...Something substantial inside me...?

She had no idea what that was.

But the Cerberus barked while waiting below the towel falling from the sky.

"If this was something inside me coming to the surface, why did it happen?"

"Heh heh. This certainly would be an annoying method of finding yourself." Kimi smiled bitterly while bending forward and pressing her knee against her chest. "It would have to happen when you started looking at the things inside yourself. Just as Asama said earlier, wouldn't that be when you were losing confidence in yourself?"

"Has that ever happened to you, Kimi?"

"Not anymore."

She said that so readily.

...That's about what I expected.

They had known each other long enough for her to think that.

But Kimi had more to say.

"And this is a good thing. What you were trying to look at came out so you could see it. Doesn't this seem nice when you look at it like that? What was subconsciously bringing you stress and killing your confidence has come out to say, 'That isn't true and don't you forget it.' "

"Hmm..."

She understood what Kimi was saying. But that was only a way of imaging it. It might be true, but it might not.

Although if she did not know the answer at the moment...

"Then it would make me feel better to think about it that way."

"Exactly. And if that is the case, Troiko is sure to eventually tell you just what she is. ...Look, here she comes with the towel."

Mitotsudaira looked over to see the Cerberus running over with Uzy on her back. Her small body raised the towel in her mouth and she looked ready to play some more.

...If she is my "mold", she should be quite strong.

She tried holding her hand out.

She was not asking the Cerberus to "shake", but the creature did look at her outstretched hand.

"?"

The Cerberus stepped her front half up onto the hand.

...Kh!

Am I soft for finding this so irresistibly cute? But the strength was nothing out of the ordinary. It was the same as when the Cerberus was on her head. So

even if the creature had been copied over from her...

“It would have to be a portion of my heart...”

But what? she wondered even though the Cerberus could not answer. So she prepared to throw the towel for the three-headed beast that still wanted to play. And...

“Oh?”

A sign frame appeared. It was shaped like a crop mark frame Magie Figur.

“I just finished a job and I’m headed your way, but are things closed up top?”

It was Naruze. “Up top” likely referred to the sky above the Asama Shrine.

Asama nodded and looked up to the sky.

“It’s Naito and Naruze, right? I’ll give both of you authorization, so come on in.”

“Judge,” replied the voice while Asama accessed the shrine’s settings. She used the “The Usual” list from the citizen register to give authorization for those two. And...

“There...that should do it.”

She turned around to see the instruments piled up next to the stairs into the main shrine building.

Their next task was to check over those instruments.

She then looked to Mitotsudaira, who was throwing the towel, and Kimi, who was still stretching.

...They live so freely...

She seriously thought that as she opened her mouth.

“Okay, let’s get to preparing for the Gagaku Festival.”

“Margot, the Asama Shrine is opened up top, but what will you do? You said you still have something to deliver for the Student Council, didn’t you? Should I

deliver the things from the Blue Thunder?”

Naruze glided gently through the Musashi’s sky below the stealth barrier.

She spoke into a communication Magie Figur connected to Margot.

“I finished my last delivery and I’m flying by on the right of Tama’s free flight lane.”

“Ohh, then could you stop by the Blue Thunder in a bit? I’m still at Okutama, but the port side is congested and I’m stuck. Maybe I should have gone in from below...”

“You’re carrying too much with you for that, aren’t you? ...So what are we going to do?”

When Naruze asked that, Margot pointed her Magie Figur toward her hands. The hand-drawn lines moved inside the crop mark frame and pointed to the delivery hanging from the broom.

They were posters. A dozen or so of them were rolled up into tubes.

...Wait, it can’t be...

“Are those using my drawing?”

“Yes, they are. They’re posters for the Gagaku Festival. I had them give me one extra so we can hang it up at home.”

“Thanks. ...So, Margot, are you on the way to the shops and homes where they’ll be displayed?”

“Yup. I thought it would be fine since it would help advertise Eisen. ...I’ll be stopping by the Blue Thunder too, but what about you, Ga-chan?”

“How about we meet at the Blue Thunder and head to the Asama Shrine together?”

Something was bothering her, so she tried asking. And...

“Well...”

Margot hesitated and that settled it.

Naruze understood most of it.

It was about the Edel Brocken tester exam, Marine, and the Gagaku Festival.

They had decided to take part in all three, but there was something they still did not know.

There was one question they still did not have an answer to:

...Can we actually do it?

I bet we can, thought Naruze.

She felt like their daily training and countermeasures would allow them to succeed at the tester exam, the battle with Marine, and the Gagaku Festival.

But Margot was different.

She did not think they could do it.

If she could not reach that conclusion, then she could only spend her time worrying over it.

And even if Margot thought they could *probably* do it, she was not confident enough to go beyond that.

Margot was the type to make up her mind immediately, but that speed did not just come from doing it all instantly. She was constantly thinking about all sorts of things and she simply did not let it show.

Because she was constantly thinking about a wide variety of things, she could make an immediate decision when a problem presented itself.

She was that type of careful but immediate decision-maker.

However, this kind of situation was a poor match for her.

After all...

"We have no time and we have our current skill, but we're presented with all sorts of possibilities."

Naruze kind of felt like she had forcefully invited Margot to take part in the Edel Brocken tester exam.

And the battle with Marine came from that.

Their performance in the Gagaku Festival was much the same.

The Gagaku Festival was especially troublesome.

The tester exam and the battle with Marine were challenges to move higher, so even if they lost, they would have their result. Even if they lost, they could say they fought and lost.

So the result would be theirs and theirs alone.

But everyone was taking part in the Gagaku Festival, so its result was more than just their own.

Their result would be shared with the others.

...And if we do poorly, I don't want the others comforting us, sympathizing with us, and acting like it's adorable that we were so bad.

For a Technohexen, having people act like they understood was the most painful thing of all.

Of course, it was a bit of a mystery whether or not their classmates really understood them, but...

"Margot, if we screw up, what do you think our classmates will do?"

"They'll start a public debate about why we failed and settle on some pretty selfish conclusions like the poor sales of your doujinshis were weighing on your mind or we were distracted because the nudist came to cheer us on while wearing clothes."

She would kind of appreciate that, but she also wanted to avoid it since it would probably damage their lives.

However...

"The fact that it's a lot of work even though we're trying to not take it too seriously really gives us two different ways to look at the end result."

Naruze said that while setting aside that she had invited Margot into all this.

For the tester exam, Marine had made an appearance before Wild Kamelie. For the Gagaku Festival, they had tried to just have fun with it, but they had realized how poorly prepared they were during rehearsal.

And with the Gagaku Festival in particular...

...Asama, Kimi, and Mitotsudaira are performing, too.

They were a novice band, but that alone would give them some popularity and Kimi worshiped an entertainer god.

They had the upper hand when compared to a lower-middle level band like Naruze and Margot.

They were not really in competition, but...

“We can’t afford to lose.”

“Eh?”

“I’m talking about a few different things, but I think Marine comes first.”

A light laugh escaped her mouth.

Naruze did not let go of her smile as she traveled gently through the sky. There was only one thing she had to say: “Margot, it isn’t often you’re so worried about things.”

“Ohh, sorry... Ah, but it isn’t your fault, Ga-chan, and I don’t think you did anything wrong. Okay?”

“It was your responsibility for agreeing and you aren’t thinking about the possibility of failure because you’re thinking about how we can do this properly, right? But there are just too many problems. ...Marine, for example, I think will come for us as soon as the festival starts.”

“Probably, yeah.”

Margot sounded like she was about to say “so you understand”. That deepened Naruze’s smile and then Margot said more.

“We were pretty worked up last night after eating that chicken, weren’t we?”

“We really were.” Naruze nodded. “Can you see Asakusa?”

The Null Vier was being held in the sky to the port of Asakusa.

This time, neither Wild Kamelie nor Marine were taking part. The familiar bunch was drinking alcohol, working to improve their records, and testing out

their new brooms or thrusters.

Naruze watched them as she spoke.

"I really like that atmosphere."

But...

"I want to experience something different right now."

"You sure are greedy, Ga-chan."

"I've been given the opportunity. But..."

But...

"Whether or not we can do it is a different matter. Isn't that right?"

"Yeah."

Naruze felt like she had hit on what Margot was thinking about.

So she decided to stop there. She honestly wanted to delve further into her partner's worries and she thought she was in position to do that, but...

...Margot simply hasn't made up her mind.

Margot is an immediate decision-maker, thought Naruze again.

And she added, *Her immediate decisions are based on whether or not she can do it.*

Margot was not the type to compromise.

Even if it was with Naruze, she would decide against it if she thought she would fail. No matter how much she thought she might be able to do, if it might not be possible, she would decide against it.

That was the kind of person she was.

And she had agreed to Naruze's invitation. Which meant...

...We have enough time and skill.

But, thought Naruze.

...Margot hasn't completely made up her own mind.

She needed a slight starting point to get her going. And once that piece was added to the puzzle...

"We'll be unbeatable."

She heard a sonic boom arrive from Asakusa.

Someone had likely set a record. She heard cheers, the stealth barrier around Asakusa shook, and warning sign frames blossomed.

"Margot, I'm headed to the Blue Thunder ahead of you. Some of the orders must be hot food, so I'll deliver those first."

Because if I don't...

"They'll get cold."

Chapter 10: Thinking Girl Standing Up Once More

第十章

『再立ち処の考え方娘』



Will you catch on?

Will you realize it?

Will you have a flash of insight?

Point Allocation (One Crossroads)

The white sky was soaked with the colors of late evening.

That was the stealth barrier that surrounded the Musashi. Because the Musashi was currently facing Aki in the west, the stealth barrier by the bows of Asakusa and Shinagawa retained some traces of red.

Someone stood atop Musashino's bridge, which was the tallest position at which to view that sky.

It was "Musashi".

Her eyes were closed and her mouth was slightly opened. Her arms were spread to catch the wind.

The wind was just strong enough for her gloves to flutter. She thought to herself as the movements of the evening air washed over her and fluttered her hair.

...I have determined this is a nice wind.

The wind she felt was being produced by the Musashi. The somewhat salty wind was created by the giant ship's vertical motion and the temperature differences between different areas. It produced a convection current as it circled within the defense barrier.

"Musashi" wondered if this was what it would feel like to feel blood flowing through your body.

And she entered a quick reboot process.

She entered an instantaneous sleep to optimize the day's data.

She could do so at any time, but she had chosen this time of late. Most of the shops and companies were closed and Musashi as a whole was shifting toward night and sleep.

The Asama Shrine that managed the Musashi's infrastructure had just completed the work they had been given, so she had decided it was not a bad time to have the Musashi switch modes.

So she temporarily put herself in a self-contained mode and set her sleep time.

And she woke up.

An automaton's sleep only lasted an instant. And after that instant passed...

“—————”

She opened her eyes. And she sensed how horribly slowly it appeared through her sight devices.

An automaton's thought speed could reach speeds as high as a million times that of a human's.

What her sight devices were currently viewing was a world of time divided up at a level that humans simply could not perceive.

Automatons served humans, but this was a world they could not share with humans.

For automatons like "Musashi", their artificial brains added a wait period upon boot-up to ensure safety, and that caused this. It occurred sequentially and she spoke while being sent to the world of humans.

She spoke to the others who had chosen the same reboot time as her.

"Musashi automatons, to establish your deployment rotation, perform a pseudo-reboot of all functions and storage. Over."

"Judge," came the response. Some of the voices reached her somewhat earlier and others reached her somewhat later. Their reboot sequence differed from hers.

But there was something to fix that: shared reboot music.

It was said to have its origins in the distant past. Ancient machines were said to have played music when booting up to inform their users they had awoken.

That may have been why most automaton models had boot-up music. That music could be changed, but “Musashi” and the others used this one: “Hello world. It is time to wake up.”

The song had been passed down since the Age of the Gods.

“Include and REM statements are thrown to the sky as sent values of greeting.”

It was known as Doll Language and she let it pass through her.

“Error world. The world weeps.”

...Honestly.

“Error. When errors are mistaken for syntax, misunderstandings occur. So...”

She had to reboot quickly.

“Remain in the array of zero-time sky where wait commands will not work. Remain on the unending null surface.”

Today was a special time what with the preparations for the Spring School Festival.

“The flower of data withers and is preserved.”

The Asama Shrine’s representative had to purify the mysterious phenomena.

“Call world. The world calls to you.”

Sakai had to be looked after.

“Call. When gambling with calls and random numbers, add a checksum.”

The theatre ship had to be prepared.

“The serial world born from the press of an unassignable while loop is a grid of national borders.”

Asakusa had to be prepared as a rehearsal site to take the theatre ship’s place.

“The incomprehensible flower blossoms but is linked.”

...And we also received a strange guest from outside.

“Errors are the syntax of thought. Once they rot away, the automatons will be lined up in the REM.”

“Good morning is the sent value.”

Suzuki Magoichi. She was a rifle user from the Honganji forces.

“Heated thoughts. Lining up in never-ending matrices and commanding in multiples of eight are necessary on the ship.

“Send flowers to the human city.”

She was said to be the Far East’s greatest rifle user, but the conflict between P.A. Oda and Honganji had been settled peacefully. And the Testament said Suzuki Magoichi would join Oda afterwards.

“Confused thoughts. Format them and the memory will soon be returned.”

“The return value is the amount that was sent.”

Why was she visiting Musashi?

“The greeting is the same as the flowers: welcome back.”

That question bothered her, but “Musashi” concluded that Suzuki Magoichi was a guest at the moment.

“Pseudo-reboot complete. Everyone, return to your stations. Over.”

I need to check on her the same as I do for all other guests, decided “Musashi” as her reboot ended.

In front of her, the sky made from the white barrier’s color began to grow gentler and darker.

She could see several people in the distant sky above Asakusa.

“Are the delivery workers playing around again? Over.”

In the sky, the Technohexen were enjoying a test of speed known as the Null Vier.

But down below, someone was performing an official duty.

“Thank you for the document.”

It was Masazumi.

She was receiving a stack of paper from an automaton in the plaza created from a row of wooden containers.

The cover page of the document said '47 Gagaku Festival: Receipts and Expenditures List.

It provided the exchange of necessary items and financial information for the Gagaku Festival being held that weekend.

Masazumi bowed while listening to the surrounding sounds of construction for the Spring School Festival.

The automaton in front of her was “Kuramae” who worked for “Asakusa”.

The automaton nodded back, so...

“I will be going.”

With that, Masazumi turned around.

But “Kuramae” stepped up to her side.

The automaton faced forward and looked toward Musashino as she spoke “I am already outdoors, so I will see you as far as the thick rope passageway between ships. Over.”

“Eh?”

Masazumi was confused.

She felt awkward having the automaton do that after already bringing her the document. So she shook her head, and...

“No need. I’m only going back the way I came.”

“No. The mysterious phenomenon appearance rate has been increasing lately and the sun is already setting. And to our shame, the smuggling rate on this ship is also quite high. Over.”

“Oh, yeah.” Masazumi nodded at that. “The Asama Shrine just provided some evidence related to smuggling, didn’t they?”

"It seems to have been on quite a large scale, but I have determined that is still only a small fraction. Given the extent of every transport district within the Musashi, there are countless areas managed by the corporate groups. Over."

"I see," said Masazumi with another nod.

She started walking toward Musashino.

She wanted to hurry. As an automaton, "Kuramae" would not return until she completed this job and Masazumi did not want to keep her tied up for too long.

So while walking along the container plaza to reach the starboard stern, she asked a question.

"Are you busy preparing for the Spring School Festival?"

"No, the Spring School Festival preparations are progressing on schedule. It was decided that the Gagaku Festival rehearsals will be held here, so we are also preparing for that. Over."

"Oh, because you can't use the theatre ship after that Non-God Sword showed up?"

"Judge. The theatre ship was placed under the command of the Chancellor's Officers and its interior is being reconstructed for use against mysterious phenomena. The Gagaku Festival rehearsals were originally meant to be held on the theatre ship before the Gagaku Festival, but they will all now be held on the Musashi. And when looking at all the factors, we concluded that Asakusa had the greatest capacity, so that role was given to us. That has increased our workload for the time being, but that is still better than leaving it to another ship. Over."

To sum up: they were busy. But Masazumi understood something from what "Kuramae" had said.

"You always hold the Gagaku Festival on the theatre ship, don't you?"

"Judge. The festival influences and is influenced by the ley lines, so holding it at the same place every year would, for better or for worse, create a 'mold'. ...It could be inconvenient to have that occur on the Musashi's eight ships, so we prepare the theatre ship, hold the Gagaku Festival there, and then clean it with

purifications afterwards. Last year's festival apparently created a significant 'mold', so the cleaning was quite difficult. Over."

"Last year?"

"Judge." "Kuramae" nodded. She was still facing forward while walking to Masazumi's left. "Last year, Torii-sama's band made a truly splendid performance. According to those who saw it, it created a slight manifestation of a god. It was an Ootsubaki-type and thus did not interfere with the Asama Shrine, but if Torii-sama's band is even more powerful than last year, it could lead to an unexpected situation. Over."

Even the festivals here sounded dangerous. But that made Masazumi think about the Student Council President who had fallen from the night sky the day before.

...Even she has her talents...

The Far East's leader had to be incompetent.

But talents related to games and entertainment were generally ignored.

Because those led to waste and decadence.

"The Far East is not allowed any power, hm?"

"I believe we prefer it that way. ...If we had power, we would have to be involved with the other powers, and that would affect Musashi's chances of survival. Over."

"In other words, Musashi is a place of peace."

Masazumi looked forward as she said that. And...

"...?"

Someone passed by her while arriving from the rope passageway on the starboard stern.

Their footsteps were light.

It was a demon girl and she wore three rifles over her shoulder.

"...Is she sightseeing? Over."

"Good question. ...She might be here to see the Gagaku Festival rehearsals." After replying in her usual tone, Masazumi added, "Suzuki Magoichi's name inheritor, huh?"

She heard a dog howling in the distance.

The color of evening was no longer visible in the sky.

Adele ran through the city as evening changed to night.

She was on the central road leading to Tama's shopping district.

She had used this as her running route recently.

She wore a track suit and the dogs following behind her were quite lively. However, there was some pedestrian traffic in the evening and it was also mealtime. So she spoke to the dogs.

"Okay, we're about to enter the city, so try to stay quiet."

"...!"

They barked and she was reminded of the Extra Special Duty Officer's Cerberus.

...Are things seeming pretty noisy for her too?

The Extra Special Duty Officer was a knight with a somewhat aloof atmosphere. She had always been a bit like that and it did seem she was being teased by the nudist a lot, but...

"A lot happened that time back in middle school."

After that, Adele felt like that girl kept her distance as a form of restraint.

But it helped the flow of the class as a whole that Asama and Kimi stayed with her since they were not really bothered by that kind of thing. Adele did not count the nudist because he took not being bothered by such things a little *too* far.

...But it probably helps that Asama-san and Kimi-san were already friends with her.

Ever since they entered high school, the Extra Special Duty Officer had been dragged along by those two quite a lot. Looking at how that worked, Adele had to wonder if the girl had always been like that.

She was changing.

And Adele thought that was a good thing.

Lately, the Extra Special Duty Officer had used the income of her knight's land to establish a factory and company and she commanded the vassals like Adele in her work as a knight and for the Chancellor's Officers.

She was also going to be performing in a band at the Gagaku Festival.

She had changed a lot.

And speaking of changing...

"There's Asama-san."

Adele thought as she ran.

...Asama-san has a really high position in Musashi.

She was the heir to the Asama Shrine which handled Musashi's spells, infrastructure, fuel management, and international Shinto connections.

And now Asama was going to perform at the Gagaku Festival.

Adele had heard her sing a "normal song" for the first time at Suzu's bathhouse the day before.

"It was kind of..."

"Surprising" might be rude, but that was exactly the right word.

Adele had thought those girls were more set in their ways.

But she had been wrong.

And it did not just apply to them.

Masazumi seemed to be advancing her way of thinking and Heidi was clashing head-on with Musashi's leading merchants.

They would advance to the third year next year, so it may have been time for these kinds of changes.

And when Adele viewed herself in that light...

"Ah..."

She was training as a vassal. She had the various qualifications she needed and she had a license. She could get a defense job with the rank of a Musashi vassal after graduating and she could get a career job with the guards. She could also be hired as an instructor for the academy and lead combat training.

She had a future.

But she thought about it in a different way.

...Would other people be surprised at "how much I've changed"?

She did not know. But she had a feeling she would not be surprising anyone.

She was on a predetermined path.

She had been working toward becoming a vassal for a very long time and everyone around her knew it.

So even if she did become a vassal, it would not surprise anyone. They would say "that's great" or "congratulations", but...

"Hmm..."

What did she want them to say to her?

...It's not that I want them to say "that's amazing".

To put it simply...

...I want them to say "Really!?"

That might be a dangerous thought concerning her future, but she wanted to become something that would surprise everyone.

Was that possible? Or was it no more than a dangerous thought? She wondered about that as she ran, but...

"Whoops."

She stopped thinking and running.

There was a blue shop to her left.

It was the bakery/café known as the Blue Thunder.

“That was close.”

She had just about run right past it.

But when she came to a stop, she saw a familiar face in front of it.

“Huh? Naito-san, what are you doing here?”

“Oh?”

Naito received the takeout she had ordered before getting to work.

The order had included two baskets of food, Naruze had already taken the one with hot food, and Naito herself would be taking the one with mainly cold vegetables. And as she accepted it at the entrance...

“Huh? What is it, Adele?”

“Oh, Naito-san. What are you doing here?”

“Judge. We have a band meeting at the Asama Shrine, so this food is for that. Want to join us?”

Adele’s eyes raced over to the basket. And...

“Oh, um...no, thank you...”

“If you don’t think it’s enough, just say so. And Ga-chan already took a basket over.”

“Really!?”

This girl was too easy to read. But then Adele gasped.

“No, um, I can’t because I have to study for our tests! We have the tests during the mornings of the preparatory period!”

“Ohh, we probably should’ve planned to do that at Asama-chi’s place too.”

Yeah.

“Then how about you keep tomorrow open, Adele?”

"Oh, will you have food tomorrow, too!?"

She really was too easy to read.

"Adele, are you that starved?"

"N-no, it's just that I've been doing a lot of work repairing my mobile shell recently."

"Oh, yeah. That one you said you'd received from your daddy, right?"

Adele's father had modified it for her and left it behind for her.

When she had earned her vassal learner's permit after entering high school, Adele had tried to show it off to everyone. However...

...She showed up the next day with a really brooding look on her face and said the unveiling was canceled, didn't she?

After all...

"It was really rusty and falling apart, wasn't it?"

"Judge! I spent the first three months just taking it apart and getting all the rust off... Now I'm swapping out all the unusable parts with IZUMO ones."

"Sounds like you've been productive."

There was a reason Adele's mobile shell was unusable.

Mobile shells were weapons, so you needed a license to use one, even if you were a vassal. So Adele's had been left with Musashi and had only been returned to her once she had her license.

But there had been about ten years between her father's death and earning her license.

There had not been a problem with how it was stored, but after ten years in a normal storage environment, that level of deterioration was to be expected.

It had apparently been a pretty large shock to find the item passed down to her by her father was in that state.

However...

...She never let it get her down or just brooded about it, which is pretty

amazing...

Naito did understand Adele's struggles.

...I mean, once she received the mobile shell inherited from her father, she found it was in really bad shape.

A mobile shell was not as expensive as a god of war, but it was still about the same as a home.

Since she had only just entered high school, it would have been entirely understandable if she had decided it was hopeless and simply given up.

But Adele had not let it get her down.

She must have decided she would show it off to everyone once she had properly serviced it because she had immediately started the repairs. She had probably felt like showing off a worn-out mobile shell would be the same as showing off her own mistake.

So she had started work all on her own.

At first, she had been reliant on Naomasa and had been given used maintenance equipment from the engine division.

Everyone had thought this was too large a task for the small vassal-in-training, but when they saw her earning qualifications in maintenance and the handling of dangerous objects, she had started to gain allies.

From what Naito had heard, Adele had started to work on the interior mechanisms.

And from Naito's perspective...

...That's pretty impressive.

But she and Naruze may have been similar.

They were focused more on spells, but they did tune up their brooms themselves. That similarity gave her an interest in Adele and she knew what to ask at the moment: "Is it still going to take a lot more to finish it?"

"Oh, yes. Judge. It's going to take a lot more money and time. ...The other

day, I tried moving the right leg I had put together and it broke through the floor. Now I have to earn even more money to repair the storeroom I'm renting and to reinforce the entire floor."

"If only you could earn as much money as Masa-yan..."

"Masa-san can use her Suzaku to work, so I'm pretty jealous there."

"Oh. Come to think of it, our brooms are like that, too."

When the target of maintenance was also a work tool, maintenance became a necessity to earn money.

When Naito and Naruze tuned up their brooms, their work efficiency would rise. But...

"Would that not work for you, Adele? I'm not too familiar with the vassal system."

"No, it won't work at all. The quality of your mobile shell doesn't really influence a vassal's pay much. We don't actually use them to fight, after all."

"Then why not fix it up only enough for you to wear it and move around in it?"

Adele wrinkled her brow and smiled at that. She also scratched her head.

"Well, I wouldn't really want to do that..."

"Judge. I couldn't treat my broom like that either... Sorry for asking that."

"No, no. I was complaining a little too much."

Adele bowed and Naito smiled bitterly in her heart.

She too had discussed the tester exam, Marine, and the Gagaku Festival with Naruze.

That had gotten Naruze all fired up, but...

...I want something a little more decisive.

She thought they were pretty good.

But then there were their opponents.

Would I feel differently if we had some kind of title? she wondered before

asking Adele a question.

“How are things going for you these days?”

“Well.” Adele clenched both fists. “I’d been working at it for an hour or two every two days, but now I have a part-time construction job too. The vassal qualifications require castle-building and general construction experience, and I’ve found some work that pays pretty well.”

“Did Nori-rin set that up for you?”

“Oh, yes. With some help from Persona-kun-san and Tenzou-san.”

That sounded a lot like those generally helpful boys.

But Adele’s shoulders soon drooped and she entered complaining mode again.

She started with a deep sigh.

“But even when I make so much, it all gets used up on divine transmission fees and spare parts... And that’s even with Asama-san giving me a ‘Tsirhc Discount’ on the divine transmission stuff.”

“It happens pretty quickly when you eat snacks and stuff every day, doesn’t it?”

“It really does... Wait, ahhh. Not again. I keep complaining.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that from time to time.”

Naito was used to hearing complaints.

...Ga-chan has turned complaining into part of her thought cycle...

In Naruze’s case, “dredging up all her frustrations with the present situation and throwing them out there” was a definite part of how her thoughts arrived at a conclusion. That was not complaining in the truest sense. She was simply listing her frustrations to understand her current self and her current environment, come up with a countermeasure, and decide what she simply had to accept.

So when Naruze complained, it was a sign that the problem was already headed toward a solution.

Meanwhile, Naito tended to make up her mind immediately. And since she would have to deal with the same problems as her partner, she was glad that partner was Naruze.

And *all of that* pointed toward a single fact.

...Can I look at it as Ga-chan and me both having our own way of thinking and strengths that we use to resolve and accept our problems...?

Naruze's complaints and Naito's immediate decisions were a product of that strength.

But...

"If only you had more practical work to do, Adele."

"Eh?"

"That's just how it seems to me. You were pretty amazing when you knocked down that dragon, so it seems like it would be great if you could do that a few times so you could accept that you have that kind of skill."

"That would certainly be an exciting sort of life..."

"I feel like Mito-tsan is headed in that direction. But the Far East is just so peaceful at the moment... Musashi in particular is a real outsider to history."

"That's right," agreed Adele while the dogs barked behind her.

Naito looked to them.

"I should've asked this sooner, but are you stopping by on a run?"

"Yeah, more or less. Umm..."

Adele peered inside the café.

And at that very moment, the door and the bell sounded as someone stepped out.

It was the person Naito had just been speaking with: P-01s.

Adele saw P-01s carrying a wooden bucket.

It contained hardened, unsold bread and food scraps.

It was food for the dogs.

When she had passed by in front of the Blue Thunder before, she had set up a deal to receive what they were just going to throw out. The Blue Thunder could get rid of it and she could use it to advertise to dog owners. A few of the dogs with her had bags hanging from their necks.

“These ones are buying something today.”

“Judge. I will call the manager. Also...”

P-01s placed the bucket of leftovers in front of Adele.

“Now, Adele-sama, just stick your head right in there.”

“I-it’s not for *me* to eat!”

“Oh? Shyness will get you nowhere in life.”

“It’s not about being shy! Anyone would be embarrassed to stick their head in there with the dogs!”

“You mustn’t discriminate against dogs.”

“I-I wasn’t! Pointing out a difference is not discrimination!”

“Correct. One point for Adele-sama.”

She had no idea what this was about. In fact...

“Ah, Naito-san, you’re creeped out, aren’t you!?”

“No, I just didn’t realize how pressing your situation was.”

“That’s not what this is about.”

Meanwhile, similar leftovers buckets were brought out from the other shops and the dogs dashed over to them. But she could not let them move too fast.

“Wait!!”

Her shout caused the boss-ranked dog to bark and the rushing ones came to a quick stop.

“Wow,” said Naito, making Adele feel a little proud. “Adele, can’t you use this to make money?”

"Realistically, if this was enough to make money, I think a lot fewer people would leave it to me."

And the current situation had honestly just kind of happened.

"When I was running, some of them started following me and that number just grew and grew..."

"I hear some tourists who come to Musashi will go to a guard station to report a girl being attacked by dogs and the guards complain that the tourists have no idea what they're talking about."

"Now I feel bad for the tourists."

"Don't worry, don't worry. You're not the only one causing trouble for them. ...Last night, a nudist fell from the sky, which was apparently too much for some amateurs."

"I see." P-01s nodded. "I too have yet to grow accustomed to Musashi, so I need to be careful."

"You fit in pretty well already, so I think you'll be fine, P-01s..."

Adele had to agree with Naito on that one.

However, the automaton pulled two bags from below her apron. She first handed one to Naito.

"Naito-sama, please take this to Asama-sama. It is apparently a hamburger her father ordered."

She then held up the other paper bag.

"And this is a bread crust variety pack that the manager said to give to Adele-sama. Salt, seaweed salt, consommé, garlic, and Worcestershire sauce... Each of the bread crusts has a different flavoring, but they are delicious."

"Wh-why did you tack that last part on there!?"

"Won't they be good for a late-night snack while you work on your mobile shell?"

Naito was right about that, so Adele appreciatively accepted them.

"Oh, then I'll buy something to drink."

"Ho ho? ...Something powdered? That must be it, right?"

Was that really something to ask so enthusiastically?

"Naito-san, why are you looking the other way...?"

"Now, now," said P-01s as she pulled out a chartula. "Drinking this made them feel better."

"Who is 'them'!? And what happened to them!?"

"And if you drink this, your body will feel quite steamy."

"It warms you up?"

"Steamy."

"Am I supposed to take that literally?"

"Moving on."

"That was fast!? ...Hey, why are you trying to run away, Naito-san!?"

"No reason." Naito waved. "I already drank some."

"Eh!? Are you the one that felt better!?"

"No. Mine was flavorless and had no effect at all."

"Y-you got the safest one!! I want that one!"

"Why not just drink water?"

That was an excellent point. However...

"I want to drink something with a flavor to it. Do you understand? When you're working late at night, you can get distracted by your empty stomach and, if you only drink water, you feel so very hungry and can almost feel the shape of your stomach. But if you drink something with a flavor, you feel more like 'ahh, that was a nice break' and 'let's work a while longer'."

"Ho ho? Well said." P-01s pulled out another chartula. "Adele-sama, this one has a flavor."

"What flavor?"

"A flavor."

This is dangerous, thought Adele. She had started to sense these things in advance lately. Not that it helped much.

...Umm.

She tried asking a question.

"I understand that it has a flavor, but what flavor is it?"

"What flavor would you like?"

"Well... Since I'll be working late at night, maybe an herb that helps wake me up."

"Then we can go with that."

"I-I don't like the sound of that!"

"Now, now," said P-01s as she placed the chartula in the paper bag meant for Adele.

She then handed that bag to her.

"Here. This is a wonderful collaboration between the manager and me. That puts it on the same level as washing the dishes."

"That seems a little too incredible, but I'll take it..."

But that alone was not enough.

"Um, how much do I owe for that flavored powder?"

"...You must not pay money for something like that."

"But I'm going to drink it!"

Naito tried to surreptitiously fly away, so Adele grabbed the broom and pulled her back.

However, P-01s had already moved on to her next job.

She was setting up a board on the window frame next to the Blue Thunder's entrance. It normally displayed the day's specials, but it currently had a large poster thumbtacked to it.

...Oh, that's Naruze-san's drawing.

A shrine maiden group and a winged girl group were singing with a brightly lit stage in the background.

"Is that a poster for the Gagaku Festival?"

Naito nodded at Adele's question.

"That's right. The Student Council sent us a delivery job this afternoon and a few of us distributed them."

It was only an announcement at this stage.

That seemed like a slow pace with less than a week to go, but...

"The performing bands will be announced three days beforehand, right?"

"Our band and Asama-chi's band will be playing. And I'm sure the President's will. Plaguer and Red Light District Clan probably will, too."

It felt weird saying it herself.

...So Asama-chi will be there.

The Asama Shrine's heir was playing in a band.

Even if she was familiar with music via Gagaku, this was a completely different direction for her.

The girl's personality probably played a role in making this so unexpected.

Naito had thought Asama was stricter with herself. That was probably why she felt this odd confusion about this.

But *her classmates would be there.*

It was obvious what would happen if they were there. Adele said it out loud: "With Kimi-san and the Extra Special Duty Officer with her, she's really going to stand out..."

"A beginner band has incredible power once they get started."

P-01s tilted her head at that. She would not know much about bands and she probably did not know what any of this meant. She briefly looked inside the shop before speaking.

“According to the manager, Kimi-sama is a semi-pro.”

“Oh, judge. She’s gone through the Asama Shrine to bring Ootsubaki-style music to the streets and she’s gained a fair bit of popularity.”

Kimi had gained popularity over time, the Asama Shrine’s heir was known for Gagaku, and Mitotsudaira was both second in line to the Far East and a Rank 1 Knight.

“Asama-san’s band will almost certainly gain the most attention after the announcement, won’t they?”

Naito did not merely agree. There was something else she knew would happen.

“Even if they do gain that attention, it won’t bother them much...”

“No, it probably won’t...”

Adele sighed with a bitter smile.

Naito realized she was making the same expression.

“Asama-chi gathers attention with the Asama Shrine’s rituals and Mito-tsan’s position is much the same. And Kimi-chan enjoys attention, so there’s no way it’ll bother her.”

“Grouping them in a band is like cheating...”

Naito had to agree. And once she thought about it...

“That band defeated the Non-God Sword and Hidden Dragon, so they’re a god slayer and dragon slayer band. How are we supposed to stand up to that?”

And...

...That’s the Asama Shrine for you.

With that thought, she realized what was bothering her about this.

She was looking at the “history” and “reputation” of the people they would be facing.

Asama was from the Asama Shrine.

Marine was a former subordinate of Almirante's and a skilled former member of Tres España.

Wild Kamelie had apparently made something of a name for herself in M.H.R.R.

Meanwhile, she and Naruze were crawling up from zero.

They had to create a history and reputation for themselves.

Some people had those things and some did not. They did not.

That was probably what was bothering her.

...It might not be, but let's say it is.

And with that decided, she began to think about what to do about it.

Then Adele spoke to her.

The girl's eyebrows were raised and her hand was on her chest.

"Aren't you, Naruze-san, and me dragon slayers, too?"

"Eh?"

"Well, um." Adele smiled. "We all worked together to defeat that thing."

So...

"I think we were all a dragon slayer team. Each and every person who was out there fighting can call themselves a dragon slayer."

...Ah.

After a while, Naito nodded.

"Now that you mention it..."

Although it still did not feel real to her.

It was true they had worked together to defeat the Hidden Dragon.

She was a little skeptical whether she had done all that much, but the result was the result.

Asama had made the final blow, but that was her role.

They had all participated in the fight according to their respective roles and they had achieved the desired result.

...In that case...

If they were still not satisfied and wanted *something more*, then how were they to do that?

“We would have to seek a title even greater than that...”

“Eh? What was that?”

“Ah? No, um, I was only talking to myself.”

Higher.

There was always something higher.

She had thought that before, but it meant something else now.

Before, she had been looking up at what was higher than her.

But now...

...It's because we're not satisfied with who we are now.

So they had to reach those greater heights.

They had defeated a dragon.

But if they were not satisfied with that...

“_____”

Naito thought, *We just have to defeat something beyond a dragon.*

Marine.

Wild Kamelie.

The Gagaku Festival also qualified. Meaning...

“We have to do what we can in our own way.”

Is that all? she thought feeling relief wash over her.

At the same time, it was easy to compare yourself to your friends at this stage in life. And you would tend to justify it by saying you were getting a better grasp of your own situation.

But...

...You have to shape yourself up first.

"I see."

A quiet laugh escaped her lips.

And then she spoke.

She said what it was that had occurred to her during this exchange.

"In that case, you're also a god slayer, Adele."

Hearing that, Adele looked up into the sky.

To show she was thinking, she stared up at the stealth barrier that still had a slight hint of the evening's color.

"Ah."

She smiled when it hit her.

She had apparently not been aware of that fact.

...I see.

These titles may have been trivial to those who held them.

In that case, I guess it's fine, thought Naito.

"Then I'll have to put the pressure on my superior fighter."

"Judge. I'm not sure what you mean, but take care," said P-01s with a bow.

"Naito-sama. ...Please deliver that burger to Asama-sama's place."

Chapter 11: Visitor at an Inspection Point

第十一章

『検分場の来訪者』



現在の意味
未来の自分
過去の環境
配点 (全てのこと)

The meaning of the present

Yourself in the future

The environment of the past

Point Allocation (Everything)

Choosing an instrument is pretty hard, thought Mitotsudaira.

If she was the only musician, she could base the decision on herself, making it a lot easier.

But this was different. She would be playing with Asama and Kimi.

“We’ll need to coordinate a lot of things. Although what to wear is pretty obvious.”

“Is it?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“Yes,” confirmed Asama while turning toward Mitotsudaira. “Mito, do you have a combat outfit for use against mysterious phenomena? Other than your school uniform, I mean.”

“No, my uniform plus attachments is enough for work with the Chancellor’s Officers.”

“Then if you like, we can wear the shrine maiden outfits.”

“I see,” said Mitotsudaira with a nod.

It was true the Asama Shrine’s shrine maiden outfits were formal and also built for combat against mysterious phenomena.

Naruze was going ahead and checking over the instruments before Naito arrived. She looked down at her own uniform and spoke.

“We were thinking of wearing our Technohexen outfits for the main performance. I thought a dress might also work, but the whole mysterious phenomena business rules that out.”

“Is that why you asked Naomasa to reinforce your brooms?”

Naruze answered Mitotsudaira’s question with a sharp look.

It was a powerfully accusatory look that said “you noticed?”, but it soon softened.

“That’s for something else. Something we want to settle before the Gagaku Festival.”

“Judge,” said Mitotsudaira and Kimi nodded along with her.

They were aware of how the Technohexen fought over their ranking within the delivery community.

Those two were at Rank 3 and when they had moved up to that spot...

...My king cooked them a tart, didn’t he?

Mitotsudaira was kind of jealous.

But, she thought. That doesn’t really matter.

Because I can get a reward myself when I complete some job as a knight.

...A reward of yakiniku...!

She had a feeling that was not quite the same thing.

Between a tart and yakiniku, the latter was generally more expensive.

The former was a dessert, but with yakiniku, pork was the main dish, beef was the side dish, and venison was dessert. *That should work.* But...

“Um.” She suddenly asked Naruze a question. “When you want to celebrate something, is it okay to be treated to meat by someone you care for?”

The Weiss Hexen immediately responded.

“Treated to meat? ...Is that a euphemism?”

Meanwhile, with Mitotsudaira’s parents...[Omitted]

“N-no! That isn’t what I meant. I only meant yakiniku!”

She frantically denied it, but Kimi laughed while checking the angle of a floating drum.

"Heh heh. Mitotsudaira, you can think about your reward later, so help me out here."

"J-judge! U-um, help how?"

"Well," said Kimi as she opened a sign frame. It displayed them in shrine maiden outfits. The photo had likely been taken when they were fighting the Hidden Dragon.

She tapped the sign frame once for a wide version.

"As you can see here, Asama is white and red, I'm more white and black than anything, and you are white and blue."

"So if we want a matching color, it either has to be white or something other than red, black, or blue."

"Really?" asked Asama, but the reason was simple.

"It either has to be a color we all share or a color none of us uses," explained Mitotsudaira.

"Don't forget that we can all choose different instrument colors," reminded Kimi. "But as I said down in the storeroom, we can only think about choosing a vintage wooden instrument if it has a Far Eastern design."

"Why?"

"Because we are shrine maidens." Kimi embraced a wooden reinforced *biwa*. "Look, if a shrine maiden holds it between her boobs, only a Far Eastern one will look right. ...Oh, but you can't do that regardless, can you? No, you can't. Sorry, Mitotsudaira."

"You obviously did that on purpose!"

"Now, now," said Kimi. She then sat down and held the *biwa* she had inspected. She used the proper *biwa*-playing pose. "We're going for the look of a shrine maiden band. But to be blunt, that is going to be something of a shock. After all...I'm part of it." A smile appeared on her lips. "When most people see the band name Kimitoasamade, they're going to think it's my band. My music is known around Musashi and I sing and dance in public a lot. So a lot of people are going to be looking forward to this being my major debut with you two only

along for the ride. However..."

She took a breath, leaned forward, and pointed at Asama.

"We need to use our image to tell them that's not what this is. One look needs to tell them Asama leads this band. That means shrine maiden outfits. I think it's a good idea and wouldn't it be best if our instruments also matched that image? But..."

But...

"I also don't think it would be very fun if we get too fixed in place. If we just settle down in the framework of a shrine maiden band...well, just like boobs contained in a bra, it wouldn't be any fun at all. Oh, but Mitotsudaira wouldn't know what that's like. And Asama...you wouldn't understand either since you don't let yourself experience it... How troublesome..."

"Wh-what was that for!?" protested Mitotsudaira.

"And why did you throw it my way too!?" added Asama.

"Heh heh. Well, if I was being greedy, I would want the latest instruments that still have a Far Eastern look to them."

Someone responded to Kimi's words.

It was Naruze.

She spoke while comparing a long-necked guitar to her broom.

"While considering that fashion aspect, you also need to think about your individual compatibility with the instrument and how all of you will sound together. ...That will take some doing with three of you. Besides, a lot of Far Eastern instruments have a limited number of keys compared to European ones."

That was true enough.

They had to work together on the songwriting, the coloration, and the instruments themselves. And looking at it that way...

"If we take too long to make up our minds, we won't have any time for songwriting or rehearsal."

Asama nodded at what Mitotsudaira said.

...And I thought it was all going to go smoothly...

At first, she had thought they could each just choose whatever instrument they liked most, but...

"If we had just chosen what we wanted down in the underground storeroom like Kimi said, we would've been in trouble."

"That's right," agreed Kimi. "Having different colors on the stage isn't a bad thing, but we already have different colors in our shrine maiden outfits. So from here on, we either let that shine or stifle it."

Asama kind of understand what she meant, but kind of did not.

"U-umm..."

"Tomo, is your knowledge of fashion that devastatingly bad...?"

"N-no, you just brought up the topic so suddenly is all..."

Kimi beckoned Mitotsudaira over, Naruze joined them, and they turned their back on Asama. And for 30 seconds or so...

"See, it's because she can always wear her shrine maiden outfit..."

"And she can use her school uniform for formal wear..."

"How about you have her give up on fashion and go for sex appeal instead?"

After a while, they broke the scrum and Mitotsudaira turned back toward Asama.

"Umm..." said Asama with a dull sweat on her face, but Mitotsudaira smiled.

"Tomo, why not wear that sexy swimsuit you wore in that Asama Shrine ad last year?"

"Well, I have to get a new one of those every year... And that's a piece of Shinto equipment, so it isn't impure. Yes."

"Is that how it works?" asked Naruze, but that was indeed how it worked.

Regardless, Kimi waved her palm a little.

“I’ll coordinate it all, so don’t worry. More importantly...”

Kimi stood up and walked over to Asama.

And she stopped by the girl’s side.

“When we stand side by side, our hair color and volume are pretty different. We need to think of a priority order for when someone moves out in front or our movements cross over on stage.”

“We have to think about that too...?”

It was not Kimi who nodded. It was Naruze.

“Margot and I have nearly opposite colorations, so when we cross over or move close together, it can make it so neither of us stands out very much. So when approaching each other, we try to keep things as two-dimensional as possible on the left and right. If possible, I’d also like to get the lighting just right.”

“The lighting?”

“You can change the color, right? Thanks to England and Hexagone Française’s progress in their theatre history recreations, a lot of lighting effects are available. So when Margot is the main, we’ll use yellow lights to match my color to hers. And when I’m the main, we’ll use white lights to wash out the golden color of Margot’s wings.”

...Wow.

At this point, it was beyond anything Asama could comprehend or control.

But Kimi smiled a little.

“You’ve really prepared for this.”

“Judge. We realized we didn’t look so great at the rehearsal the other day, so we felt like going all out and trying a bunch of things. So we’re going to bow down to the Festival Operations Committee and the theatre-related clubs to make sure those things are set up starting with the next rehearsal. Also,” she continued. “We have a new song ready. I wrote it with Margot.”

She opened a Magie Figur.

It displayed handwritten music with lyrics written along with it.

The lyrics showed signs of being rewritten many times. Naruze and Naito had likely debated over the wording quite a bit. Asama knew them well enough to picture that.

...They're quite motivated here.

And Asama's heart reacted to the term "new song".

...They make them themselves.

Those two had done that all along. A few of those songs were used as commercials for Eisen, the name they went by for their delivery business.

But it felt different to know this was a new song she had never heard before.

Those two really were motivated and working hard. In that case...

"Is that...one of the Technohexen songs you're so good at?"

"No. If anything, it's more lighthearted."

"Oh?" said Kimi. "Changing religions?"

"I thought you'd say that." Naruze spread her mouth horizontally but then smiled with her eyebrows lowered. "We'll let you hear it later."

And after some hesitation, she continued.

"There's no point in hiding what we can do from one of our own."

One of our own.

Asama was somewhat surprised by that phrase.

She had known Naruze and Naito for a long time, but since they were Technohexen, their lives were often quite different from the rest of the class.

The Asama Shrine managed the infrastructure and divine protections for Musashi's residents, but while Technohexen used that at the foundation, they used their own Magie Figurs on top of it.

Each of them was a spell engineer on Asama's own level.

Asama too would create spells sometimes and she would construct settings for divine transmissions and the like. But that was all built from the great backbone of Shinto knowledge and techniques.

However, Technohexen were generally making one-off things for personal use, even if they did have some things passed down or used as a foundation.

So Asama thought the Technohexen were more impressive when it came to creation. However...

...One of their own, huh?

She thought that referred to someone else standing on the stage of music. But even so...

"That's right." Asama could not stop the smile that rose to the surface. "There's no point in hiding what we can do. So, Naruze, if you notice anything we lack, please tell us."

Hearing that, Naruze turned toward her.

She raised her eyebrows with her cheeks red.

"We're busy too. And you have Kimi with you."

"Yeah, I think I'll have my hands full." Kimi held a reinforced guitar and lightly rapped the bottom. "I have to think about our choreography, movements, and lighting for the stage. And I also have to help Asama and Mitotsudaira with their songs' melodies and write the accompaniment myself."

Asama gasped at that.

"We'll be writing...our own songs?"

"Yes. That's for the best. Especially when Naruze and Naito have a new song."

"Wait," said Mitotsudaira. This seemed to have been a surprise for her too. She took a step forward. "I already have my knight's song. An unannounced one."

"If you want a knight's song to sing on the stage, write one that captures your current feelings," said Kimi. "Also, Asama needs to prepare two songs."

"Huh!?"

Mitotsudaira heard an awfully loud and confused voice reverberate across the shrine's grounds.

That was a shrine maiden's prayer-trained voice. It was loud enough to cause an audible shaking in the main shrine's door. The Cerberus sleeping on Mitotsudaira's head hopped to her feet.

Hanami must have picked up on Asama's emotion while floating next to the girl. She looked back and forth between Asama and Kimi with a look of confusion and surprise.

But Mitotsudaira understood why Asama was so confused.

"Kimi? ...Why two songs?"

"R-right?"

Asama frantically opened a sign frame to display their Gagaku Festival registration form and she held it up so they could see.

"We're registered for three songs. Are you not going to sing, Kimi?"

"Heh heh. It would be pretty cool if I told you two to handle it. I would be arrogantly saying none of the other performers were worth my time. ...But I will be singing and impressing them all, so I hope they're ready to be vanquished."

Asama was not quite sure what she meant toward the end there, but that was normal.

But if what Kimi said was true...

"...Why does Tomo need two songs?"

That question was answered by bitter laughter.

But it was from Naruze.

She had drawn a rough sketch on her Magie Figur and was viewing them through it to make some corrections.

"Listen."

"How about you stop drawing first?"

"This takes top priority now." Naruze continued drawing as she spoke. "You're pretty motivated, aren't you? You..."

At that point, she was suddenly interrupted.

"Hey, this is Nai-chan. Do you have a moment?"

Naito's Magie Figur appeared in front of Asama.

Her lowered-eyebrow expression appeared on the screen.

"Asama-chi, can I get one additional entrance authorization for the Asama Shrine?"

...Entrance authorization?

Mitotsudaira asked Naito what she meant.

"Why-...?"

She did not get a chance to finish with "do you want that".

Because Asama immediately nodded with eyebrows raised.

"Understood. I will give authorization."

She began changing the settings on her sign frame, but she also looked overhead.

The reason for Asama's decision was in the sky.

At about fifty meters above the Asama Shrine, two people floated with the dim stealth barrier ceiling as a background.

It was Naito and...

"Who is that other one?"

Mitotsudaira grew cautious, so Naruze explained.

"That's Marine. ...She's at Rank 2 in the delivery business." She shrugged as she continued from there. "She says she wants to crush us over a personal grudge before she fights for Rank 1. ...Asama, after we talk some, we'll head up to fight, but can you keep the entrance authorization in effect?"

"Th-that will not be necessary. Probably."

A quiet but undeniably powerful voice rang from Naito's Magie Figur.

It belonged to the woman with the Urban Name of Marine.

She was a blonde-haired and four-winged descended angel.

Her four thrusters looked like crosses and were attached to her shoulders and hips.

"Asama Shrine Representative, if possible, could we use the Asama Shrine's grounds as a site for our battle?"

Marine stuck her head into Naito's Magie Figur from the side, but she did bow.

"We will be limited to the shrine's grounds. In other words, within the stealth barrier. ...Would that be possible?"

"Hey, Almirante."

A female voice rang through the dark sky.

In the sky above Oume, a flying boat was stopped above a tall derrick mast. A *schale besen* glided in right alongside Almirante.

"Wild Kamelie, I thought you were delivering outside today."

"Konishi's place says they'll be purification cleaning the entire ship, so that's not happening."

"Oh, because of what happened earlier. Y'know, the big boom on the right of Okutama."

"Yeah, it was probably that. ...And since I've got nothing to do now, can you give me some work for the night?"

"Hold on." Almirante opened a sign frame. As the boss of the delivery business, he searched for jobs no one had touched yet. "There are no standard paperwork deliveries."

"It's not really the time for that... Anything urgent?"

"Tons."

"Judge," said Wild Kamelie with a nod. She pointed to the nearby areas down below. "Anything that I can glide to from here?"

"I'll have you travel around Oume. To pick up the slack."

"Judge." Wild Kamelie got off her *schale besen* and set her feet down.

She opened a Magie Figur and received the work instructions from Almirante. Then she pressed her finger on it and signed it.

"What are the others doing?"

"If you mean Marine, she's at the Asama Shrine. ...You get that Oume work done."

"A battle inside the barrier? That's not going to be easy."

"For which side?"

"If they catch on, Marine. If they don't, Zwei Fräulein."

With that, Wild Kamelie put her sunglasses back on and waved at Almirante.

"Can you see the Asama Shrine from there?"

"Nope." Almirante spread his mouth in a horizontal smile. "The shrine is holy ground. ...You can't see it at night."

The Asama Shrine's grounds were about 25m wide and 16m deep.

In addition to the gravel plaza in front of the main shrine, there was a hand-washing station with a small roof and smaller shrines on the port and starboard sides.

Three people faced each other at the center.

They were divided one against two.

The one, Marine, stood to port. The two, Naito and Naruze, stood to starboard.

And Asama stood in the center.

"I generally understand the regulations. There is a lot I would like to say, but since this is a mock battle being offered to our god, all bullets will be replaced with concussive blows. ...And the rules for a two-against-one battle mean that the two side loses if they fail to defeat their opponent within the time limit or if either of them fails to stand back up after a ten count, right?"

"Judge. That's right. So the KO rules will be a ten count after collapsing. Let's also say that leaving the designated area counts as a loss. And the time limit will be three minutes. ...Marine, how does that sound?"

Naruze had removed her uniform's sleeves and skirt and Marine nodded.

"I would be fine with five minutes too."

"Wow, you must be confident..." Naito had also removed her sleeves and skirt and she raised her broom. "But why do it here?"

"Can you not use your brooms properly on such a small field?" asked Marine.

Mitotsudaira frowned while waiting by the main shrine.

"Your thrusters were originally meant for land battles, weren't they? They have contact dampers on the bottom."

"Judge. ...They were developed to move between ships and conquer the enemy ship during the Armada Battle, so they let you fly over and break through as quickly as possible. But they were ultimately abandoned when they mass-produced gods of war, problems cropped up with their arbitrary effects, and they could not get enough trained members of species that could use them."

"Then," said Naruze as she looked around. "Is this field your specialty?"

"I can fight just fine outside of it."

"Then why go out of your way to choose this place?"

Marine answered the Technohexen's question while wrinkling her brow and clenching her fists.

"B-because you said earlier that your preparations were complete."

“...Ga-chan, it looks like she actually took that at face value.”

“Don’t say it, Margot. ...I’m ashamed of myself for putting on an act like I was Neshinbara or something,” said Naruze. “But, Marine, why are you going out of your way to fight us?”

“I am still a newcomer.” Marine smiled with her eyebrows somewhat lowered. “And my homeland will soon decline.”

“...And you don’t want to be seen in the same light?”

Marine did not answer Naito’s question.

So Asama moved instead. She lightly clapped her hands, and...

“Okay, are you ready? Then begin!”

That led to movement.

The two Technohexen and the one Marine took instant action.

Chapter 12: Responders of the Twin Walls

第十二章

『双璧の応答手』



知ってる?
距離が離れていても
向き合っていれば
何が起きるのか
配点（応答）

Do you know

What happens

When you face each other

Even at a distance?

Point Allocation (Response)

The battle began with an intersection.

Marine suddenly leaped forward from a distance of seven meters.

She moved in a straight line, with no evasive action or feinting. She only lowered her body slightly, but she did use the thrusters on her shoulders and hips.

“Now then.”

So it only took an instant for four-winged Marine to jump in between the Technohexen.

Meanwhile, the Technohexen responded to the sudden approach.

“...!?”

They took defensive stances and started to move, but then they stopped.

After all, Marine did not do anything.

If she had moved in close and attacked, the defenders could have dealt with it. But because they could do that, Marine’s action filled Zwei Fräulein with confusion.

It only lasted a short moment, but all motion came to a stop.

And it was Marine who started back up a moment later.

With a burst from her thrusters, she blasted wind behind her.

That wind blew the gravel away and the air pressure reflected off the ground.

“Kh...!”

And the Zwei Fräulein pair was blasted to the front and back of the shrine

grounds.

Naruze scraped along the gravel by the shrine building.

...Why you...!

She had been blown away and slid a few meters after landing on her knees. She had kept herself from rolling, but it still pissed her off.

After all, that attack had not been made by the enemy's weapon. She had only used the air explosion of her thrusters to throw them off balance.

She was angry that she had been brought to her knees before the enemy had even produced her weapon.

"Kh...!"

She groaned and flapped the main wings on her back.

She attempted to pursue Marine with her broom in hand, but...

"Hello."

When she turned around, Marine was right there.

...You're kidding.

Hadn't the blast that hit Naruze accelerated Marine in a jump to starboard?

But that estimation differed from reality.

And Marine pressed something cold against Naruze's jaw.

It was the muzzle of a metal gun.

She had already squeezed the trigger and Naruze heard the automatic flintlock mechanism.

"...!"

Mitotsudaira heard three sounds and she saw two movements and one reaction.

The three sounds were all of weapons-fire.

The movements were of Naruze on the grounds' aft end and Naito on the fore end being blasted further to aft and fore respectively.

And the reaction was...

"In the sky!?"

About three meters above the Asama Shrine, the top of the barrier emitted light.

That was the defense reaction of something striking it from below.

...Was that...?

Kimi nodded next to her.

"Naito shot Naruze to knock her out of the way and save her, so Marine also shot Naito and Naito blocked with her broom. Marine's bullet that should have hit Naruze instead hit the ceiling. ...That's my guess anyway."

That was probably about it. But if Kimi was right, then Marine's weapon was...

"A pair of ether pistols..."

That was exactly what Marine held in her hands. The large double-barrel handguns had a somewhat outdated design. The one she held in her right hand was still aimed behind her toward Naito. And...

"There."

The one in her left hand was aimed at Naruze who had been shot out of the way by Naito.

Gunfire sounded once more.

Asama saw a sudden flap from some midair black wings.

The movement sent the wings back and to the right and that strike caused Naruze to spin in midair.

...Ohh.

I didn't know they could move like that in the air, thought Asama while Naruze swung her arm in the middle of her spin.

She held a pen in her right hand and the leftward rotation of her body allowed it to draw a long arc.

The drawn line was directed toward Marine.

“...!”

And the coin Naruze fired from her left hand raced toward Marine.

Naruze saw an instantaneous explosion.

The smokeless and fireless blast was made of air.

Marine had accelerated.

The coin bullet Naruze had fired was deflected by the air explosion and scattered through the air. And Marine...

...Where is she!?

Naruze instantly checked all four directions: left, right, up, and down.

She continued facing forward and used the edges of her vision to check. She pursued the enemy with the confirmation method used by the warriors and guards of every nation.

And she found the enemy.

She was in an unexpected location.

“Right in front of me!?”

She was not in any of the four directions.

Marine had not used the high-acceleration blast to move.

...It was to rotate once on the spot...

Her midair rotation had become something of a side flip and she had even made sure to spread her legs for landing.

And as she flipped upside down, her left hand held a pistol.

“...”

The gunshot targeted Naruze's legs.

Naruze's reflexes chose defense.

But her action did not come from training. When the attack arrived, she lifted up her feet and embraced her body with her arms as if curling up.

And that movement saved her.

The first bullet passed below her lifted feet.

"..."

Marine's gun had used the recoil to instantly lift itself up and it now targeted Naruze's face.

But the next shot was blocked by the broom in Naruze's right hand. She had pulled it in while embracing her body.

With a solid sound, her body was knocked back through the air. But she had used her broom as a shield and chosen what path she would be pushed along.

She had placed her raised knee against the broom's upper surface to send herself backwards. And as she flew toward the main shrine, her right hand drew out several lines in the air.

Most of them were firing lines targeting Marine as her flip came to an end. Instead of a straight-line path, Naruze used curving lines to strike her enemy from above and below.

"How about that!?"

But Marine stopped.

She stopped while upside down in the air.

She must have realized she would have difficulty dodging and defending during her flip, so while upside down...

"...Asalto!!"

She charged toward Naruze.

Mitotsudaira saw an upside-down swordfight.

Not a gunfight.

Marine's weapons were indeed a pair of guns, but...

...Those are ship-top sword combat movements!

Ship-top sword combat.

The fighter primarily fought while turned to the side in order to fight atop poor footing such as ropes or narrow bridges. In Marine's case, she kept her left side forward. She kept her forward left elbow lowered and her rear right hand higher than her head and lightly swaying to keep her overall balance.

The Hexagone Française equivalent was known as thrust sword fighting and it allowed you to rapidly advance using thrusts.

The rear hand acted as your rudder while you made repeated high-speed thrusts.

But there was one clear difference from that sort of sword fighting: these were guns.

When thrusting a gun forward like a sword, it had penetrative power with essentially limitless reach.

This was high-speed sword fighting that ignored the usual reach limitations.

That was how Marine moved.

While Naruze fell back and fired, Marine lunged forward with no concern for her enemy's gunfire.

She was upside down.

Marine had probably trained for this kind of movement. Most likely...

"She has been trained for actual combat, hasn't she!?"

Marine's actions provided an eloquent answer.

She avoided Naruze's extreme close-range gunfire as if stepping over it.

Meanwhile, this had to be Naruze's first time fighting in these conditions. Mitotsudaira had received a knight's combat training, but even she had never fought while upside-down.

Marine's gunfire accurately targeted Naruze and the Technohexen responded.

"-----!!"

She desperately deflected Marine's attack with the broom shield she pushed at with her knee and she continued drawing her attack lines.

But the number of coins she fired was noticeably reduced from before.

She was being pushed back. In fact, her wings bent as she fell back toward the main shrine.

Naruze was in trouble.

So Mitotsudaira looked to Naito on the fore end.

...Margot!

But when she looked in that direction, Mitotsudaira saw something unexpected.

Naito too was being fired on and kept from moving like she wanted.

"How!?"

It was the pistol.

Marine held her right arm behind her head to balance herself.

And the second pistol she held in that hand was firing on Naito.

While she gently swung the arm, the twin barrels tore into the ground at Naito's feet.

...Oh, no!

Naito silently expressed amazement at Marine's aim.

She had not been firing on Naito. The woman's bullets were hitting the gravel near her toes.

That seemed like nothing. It looked like she had missed.

But that was not the case. Marine was accomplishing one simple task.

...She's keeping me from taking a single step forward!

Winged species like them also had to move the wings on their back when they moved their body. Their wings were heavy and created air resistance, so a solid first step was important when moving.

Especially when she wanted to quickly pick up speed like she did here, she would be moving too slow if she raised her wings to flap them. She had to stay low as she stepped forward and then lightly pull back to more compactly lift her wings.

But her enemy had sealed off that initial step.

She could not move. Since she could not gain the initial speed she needed, the enemy could shoot her at any time. If she tried to move now, a shot would fly toward her body instead of the ground at her feet. So...

“Kh...”

She had to maintain her defensive stance and she was held in place.

...I have to do something...!

As soon as she thought that, she saw that Naruze had been pushed all the way back to the main shrine.

The sounds of gunfire grew louder and Naruze was blown away.

“Ga-chan!”

Naito cried out as Naruze crashed into the shrine.

Marine moved.

She heard the Schwarz Hexen cry out behind her, and...

“...!”

She fired.

Straight ahead. The Weiss Hexen crashed back-first into the main shrine.

But she did not actually reach the shrine building’s structure. The barrier set up for the battle formed a wall in front of the building and the Technohexen

merely slammed into that cage.

The Technohexen's friends and the Asama Shrine Representative were watching them from the pile of instruments to the side of the stairs leading up to the main shrine. But they could not assist the Technohexen. So...

...Here I go!

Marine moved forward.

She used repeated gunfire sword thrusts to hunt the Technohexen.

And in that instant, the Technohexen did something.

She kicked her shield broom toward Marine.

"...Eh!?"

Marine's movements were very slightly thrown off by the Technohexen's choice to make herself defenseless.

A moment later, the Technohexen fired a shot with her left arm.

It came from the shield's previous location. The enemy's accurate shot was launched toward Marine's face from the space she had been avoiding targeting.

Asama saw Marine flip once more.

Her upside-down body was flipped right side up.

And she used that to avoid Naruze's bullet.

But Asama saw something else too.

...Eh?

Marine lightly twisted her body.

At first glance, she seemed to have carelessly lost her balance. However...

"Heh heh. She's dodging that, isn't she?"

What Kimi meant soon became apparent.

A beam of light from behind passed through the space Marine's body had just occupied.

Naito had fired to take advantage of the disturbance in her movements. And...

...Eh?

There was a reason Asama mentally voiced her confusion a second time.

The shot Marine had avoided hit the broom Naruze had kicked away.

With a solid sound, the white wing broom returned to Naruze's hands. And it had rotated ninety degrees so it pointed to the side.

It looked a lot like an acrobatic stunt, but...

...*Was it a coincidence?*

No. After all, Naito had called out to Naruze beforehand.

That had not said what she would be doing. However...

"That cry let Naruze accept that Naito would do something about it," said Kimi. "So Naruze's duty was to create an opening for Naito to act. And so they both played their role."

A moment later, Naruze activated her broom's thruster full blast and flew to port.

On the fore end, Naito also held her broom to her side and accelerated to port.

They would meet up on the port edge of the barrier.

"This is it..."

Asama thought the rest of her comment: *Zwei Fräulein can regroup.*

But a moment later, Asama saw something else.

A bit toward the main shrine end of center, the gravel was blasted into the air like a surging wave.

That was proof that Marine had launched herself at high speed.

Naruze saw something other than Margot in front of her.

She still had another four meters to go before regrouping with Margot.

But a four-winged figure with thrusters equipped had cut her off. And...

...A gun!

Naruze raised her broom to block the gunshot that rang out.

But that was not the only solid sound. There were two.

Margot had been deflected at the same time as her.

She had been shot downwards and Margot upwards.

Of course, a bullet was not enough to send their bodies and momentum flying. But to allow the incoming shock to leave them, Naruze had jumped forward and up while Margot had slid downwards.

They were still allowed a small exchange, but...

“Kh...”

She and Margot were unable to regroup and they were sent flying away while passing above and below Marine.

This time Naruze was on the fore end and Margot was on the aft end by the main shrine.

They had been split up.

Naito felt a cold sweat in her heart.

...This is bad...

She was not certain, but she sensed a threat here.

If she let the feeling transform into panic, that threat would become a danger.

But, she thought about the threat she sensed.

...She's keeping Ga-chan and me from working together!?

Eye contact.

Calling out just their partner's name.

Whenever they used movements or sounds, the enemy would detect it and intervene.

The reason why was obvious.

Naito formed the words as she fell back and caught Marine's gunfire on her broom.

"You're a battlefield warrior..."

"Marine" was an accurate description of the woman.

"Your equipment is meant for combat between and atop ships, but since so very few people can use that equipment, your training would focus on fighting against superior numbers. So you know how to detect the cues the enemy uses to work together when they outnumber you."

"Judge. ...Split up the enemy and then focus your attention on one at a time, starting with the most easily managed. That is the standard tactic."

She was far more experienced. That was all it was.

...It really pisses me off...!

Back at the Blue Thunder, Naito had realized that titles did not matter and so she had wanted the challenge.

She had cast aside her doubt to reach for this higher level, but she was realizing now that it really was on a higher level.

She and Naruze had been split up when faced with the undeniable skill brought by experience.

"Margot!"

And then she realized the gunfire was coming.

Marine had accelerated while making a straight-line jab with her pistol.

Naruze was held in place by Marine's backwards gunfire.

The enemy had altered the previous setup.

Not only was she focusing on Margot this time, but instead of splitting them up between fore and aft, they were now split up between opposite corners of the barrier: the starboard fore and the port aft.

...This is not good!

Margot was being driven back into the corner.

If that happened, she would be unable to escape to the side like Naruze had before. She would simply be cornered and fired on.

Naruze sensed further danger because Margot's attack spells generally used her broom as a cannon.

She could not attack while using her broom as a shield, so she would only continue to be attacked.

And currently, the number of gunshots accurately confirmed Naruze's fears.

The one, two, three of the firing hammer striking was cornering her precious partner.

But she too had bullets aimed at her feet and...

"...My face too!?"

This was different from when it was Margot. To keep her from focusing on the gunfire at her feet, some of the bullets flew toward her face and throat. And if she carelessly fell back, she too would be driven into the corner.

But she could clearly hear the gunshots. And...

"A minute and a half has passed."

She clearly heard Asama's dignified voice.

The time limit was three minutes.

Marine only had to keep them in these positions for a minute and a half.

But if that happened...

...We can't reach anything!

As soon as Naruze thought that, Marine took a step forward. Naruze saw it as an attempt to fully drive Margot into the corner.

Mitotsudaira did not know why Naruze had moved forward.

Marine had not moved.

She had thrust a bullet toward Naito while lightly crisscrossing her legs on the gravel and then returning them.

The movement of her sideways-turned body had simply made a false step and returned to her original stance.

And yet Naruze had moved forward. Kimi explained:

"That was a feint...but that might be exactly why Naruze acted."

However, her action had been careless.

She had been unable to gain solid footing due to the gunfire at her feet, so she had tried to use her broom's thrust to make a forced leap. But...

"Naruze!"

Before Mitotsudaira could cry out, Marine had used her acceleration as a weapon.

She seemed to collapse backwards, but she opened her back thrusters toward Naruze.

However, she was a fair distance away from Naruze. No matter how powerful her acceleration was, she could not directly use the air explosion as a weapon.

But she had something else to act as a weapon: the gravel covering the ground.

The 3cm stones were launched backwards like a scattershot and they struck Naruze.

"...!!"

And that was not all.

Hit by the stones, Naruze lost her balance and fell. That was when Marine launched an attack behind her.

It hit Naruze's left shoulder.

The Asama Shrine's censorship replaced the attack power with a relatively harmless concussive blow and Naruze's body flipped upside down.

She had been hit.

Marine's attack could be seen as a form of sharpshooting.

And Mitotsudaira judged the series of events on reflex.

...Well done!

This was their friends' enemy, but her actions were worthy of that praise.

She was worried about Naruze who had been flipped upside down and slammed into the port side barrier wall, but she could not interfere.

Asama was acting as the referee and she too only watched the overall progress with her eyebrows raised. But Hanami also had her eyebrows raised while standing next to Asama's face.

She must have been quite angry.

Regardless, the situation was not looking good for Naito and Naruze.

"Heh heh. That Marine woman isn't half bad."

"That's true," agreed Mitotsudaira. "When she intervened and prevented Naito and Naruze from regrouping earlier, she used her accelerating flap to launch the gravel to starboard. And then while she was driving Naito into the starboard fore corner, she hit Naruze with the gravel piled up from the previous blast. ...I'm guessing the first blast was a test to see how much gravel she could launch."

She would test out ways to take elements of the battlefield, build them into her tactics, and then use them.

That was only possible for someone with proper training and actual combat experience.

There was no point in asking why someone like that had come to Musashi. Musashi was a gathering place for people with interesting pasts.

And Mitotsudaira had a thought about what Marine was wearing:

...I'm pretty sure she's from Tres España, but...

Before, she had mentioned her homeland's decline and seeing herself in the same light.

What had that meant?

The instant the Weiss Hexen was hit, Marine felt immense relief.

...I've moved within a step of victory.

With that thought, she continued firing on the Schwarz Hexen while listening to the Asama Shrine Representative voice her approach to victory from outside the barrier.

“10.”

That number was the ten count used to see whether or not a collapsed combatant could continue the fight.

“9.”

If the ten count reached the end here, it would mean one of Zwei Fräulein was KO'd and Marine would be declared the winner.

“8.”

Don't stand back up, begged Marine.

She wanted this win so she could confirm her, Almirante's, and the others' positions.

“7.”

Yes.

She was one of the Tres Españans in Musashi. And she wanted that position to remain flat.

“6.”

The Testament said Tres España would decline.

While they would domestically work to avoid that decline, the other nations would bind them in order to keep that powerful nation from growing too strong.

“5.”

The Reconquista had only ended fairly recently, so it was a young nation. They leaned Catholic for the authority that brought and they had begun trade with the New World, but that led to an obsession with blood purity and the nation was being hollowed out.

And it was said the finishing blow would be their greatest loss in the Armada Battle against England. The Student Council was working to make sure that did not end as a simple loss, but...

...They can't wipe clean their image of being a nation destined to decline.

“4.”

After coming to Musashi, Marine had found her former commander Almirante and the others here, so she had intended to enjoy herself.

But the year before, when those two Technohexen had just entered high school, Almirante had fought them to test them out, but he had suffered an entirely unexpected defeat.

Those two had won and lost plenty of times since, but they had steadily risen in the ranks of the delivery business.

“3.”

Almirante had never asked for a rematch.

He had stuck with his loss.

She could not ask him if he was really okay with that because it had to do with his individual feelings.

But Marine felt like she and Almirante had been driven out of Tres España.

And if even their homeland lost...

“2.”

Marine thought to herself.

...How long am I going to keep losing?

Would she never have a time where nothing around her was facing defeat?

“1.”

She would win.

She would win here and wipe clean Almirante’s loss.

She would restore her former commander’s good name and change her own destiny. And for that...

...Please let me win!

But Marine realized something.

The number zero did not arrive.

“I knew it...”

Marine heard the scraping of the gravel behind her as someone stood up.

Without even looking back, she knew it was the Weiss Hexen who had dodged, fallen back, and recovered despite being hit by the gunfire.

And she knew how the girl had recovered from the impact so quickly. It went back to when those two had crossed paths earlier.

“Schwarz Hexen, did you pass her a reduction spell?”

While desperately defending in a corner of the barrier, the Schwarz Hexen looked her way.

“I won’t tell you!”

The corners of her mouth rose. But...

“Ga-chan!”

With that, she took a ridiculous action.

“Think for yourself!!”

The Schwarz Hexen yelled and moved forward.

...What a stupid decision!

Marine fired a bullet at her.

It hit.

The sound of impact rang out and the Schwarz Hexen was nearly knocked backwards.

But the Technohexen's feet slid along the gravel while she held her ground. She had caught the bullet in her left hand.

Naito felt no pain.

She had been hit in the palm of her outstretched left hand.

The bullet provided impact damage, so it would not pierce her flesh. So...

...A pain reduction spell.

That anesthetic spell was known as a Schwarz Hexen recovery spell.

It reduced the pain almost to zero in the affected area.

Of course, it did not eliminate the damage done and it did not hasten recovery.

And the worst part was how hard it was to move the body part properly with the feeling gone.

When used for healing, the absence of pain let you rest, but when used in battle...

"It lets you power through the damage you take...!"

She heard a dull sound from her left palm. She could not feel the back of her hand or the ulna.

She had apparently broken a few bones. She was pretty sure checking would tell her it was even worse than that, but she decided against it because it would put a damper on her excitement.

She simply moved forward.

But Marine was moving.

She adjusted her position to continue separating Naito and Naruze.

She moved her wings and moved quickly to create the same situation as before.

...What do we do...!?

The enemy could read their cooperation.

Their cooperative techniques had been fostered in training, so they were all things that Marine had already seen with her superior experience.

What were they supposed to do?

As she wondered that and moved forward, she heard Asama's voice.

"One minute left."

Marine thought, *Get through just one more minute and I win.*

The Technohexen were already worn down.

The Weiss Hexen had been hit. The pain reduction would keep her from using anything past her left shoulder.

The Schwarz Hexen had intentionally taken the hit, but Marine doubted the girl could use her left hand.

The enemy no longer had use of their left arms.

They were both right-handed, so that would not prevent them from attacking.

However, the loss of their other arm had an important meaning when it came to Technohexen that used coin bullets.

...It slows their loading time!

The Weiss Hexen in particular used her pen to fire. If she held her broom as a shield, she could not wield her pen.

If Marine continued firing, the Weiss Hexen would become no more than a shield and the risk would drop.

If she reduced the enemy's attack frequency like that, she could get through the final minute.

She could endure, push forward, hold them in place, and win.

She could read the enemy's attempts at cooperation. So...

...I will win!

She would win and wipe clean their “loss”. She could sweep aside the continued losses that were pushed onto her by others.

She could push back all of those things forced onto her by her nation, the organization’s development race, and her position.

“...Pierce them!”

Marine fired to accomplish that.

Asama realized Marine’s accuracy had increased.

Her aim and positioning were more certain than before.

Some sort of hesitation had left her.

...Incredible.

Marine currently had the advantage. Asama had thought she would grow somewhat careless once victory was within sight, but she instead continued firing and intensified her attacks.

Mitotsudaira groaned quietly deep in her throat.

“What are they going to do...?”

She meant Naito and Naruze.

The silver wolf raised her eyebrows slightly as she viewed the battlefield.

“When the enemy has the greater strength and is reading your cooperative tactics, the prudent course of action is to withdraw or fall back while waiting for reinforcements.”

And just as she questioned the current state of the battle, they heard a sudden sound.

It was the strumming of strings.

“...Eh?”

Asama looked back and saw Kimi holding an instrument.

It was one of the guitars that Naruze had chosen.

But Kim was not looking at Naruze. Her gaze was directed toward a Magie Figur.

Naruze had placed it in the air when she was checking over the instruments earlier. And she had told them what it contained.

...Music?

It was the Technohexen's new song. That was when it dawned on Asama.

The notes Kimi had played were the intro to the song displayed there. But...

“...Why do that?”

Asama looked to Kimi who looked up.

But not at Asama. At Naruze.

Their Weiss Hexen classmate was standing sideways and pressing her left shoulder against her broom shield.

But Naruze was moving. Her right hand held her pen as it lowered and made another small movement.

...Is she operating something?

Just as Asama wondered that, a sudden sound came from the Magie Figur displaying the new song.

It was a light pop intro. Unlike the usual Technohexen songs, it could even be described as cute.

“Margot!” shouted Naruze. “Let’s do this...!”

Marine thought, *Do what?*

She could hear some music.

But it was not like the music that Zwei Fräulein would play while working or on stage.

...It’s very light.

Technohexen songs were a form of European folklore. And they more strongly represented Eastern Europe. They were dark songs that rang through the forest and ended there.

But this was different. And...

“Eh...?”

Behind her, she heard the Weiss Hexen firing.

She knew what this meant without even looking back. The Weiss Hexen had given up on her shield and focused on attack.

How reckless, thought Marine. Is this a desperate act because time is running out?

But just as she dodged the Weiss Hexen’s coin bullet, the Schwarz Hexen did something while using her broom as a shield.

She was not in a firing stance, but she still fired a coin bullet at Marine.

...*Huh!?*

Did they have some Techno Magie they had kept hidden for use as a surprise attack?

...If you had that, you should’ve used it earlier!

But that was not what this was.

The Schwarz Hexen had not fired on her.

After all, when she looked closely at the incoming coin bullet...

“That’s the one the Weiss Hexen just fired...”

What did that mean?

It took Marine a moment to understand.

“Did she fire back the Weiss Hexen’s coin bullet with the repulsion gravity she uses for acceleration...!?”

That was not all.

She gave a quick glance back and saw the Weiss Hexen in action.

She used a line drawn by her pen to catch the coin bullet she had launched and her partner had sent back.

“Here goes...!”

It bounced back and with even more speed than originally. Also...

“Ga-chan, let’s go for another!”

While the Weiss Hexen bounced it back, the Schwarz Hexen adjusted how she held the broom she had been using as a shield.

She used the gap in Marine’s firing to fire a shot of her own. Marine would normally have immediately dodged it, but she also had to worry about the one from the Weiss Hexen at the moment.

“...!”

Marine used her full body to take evasive action.

Mitotsudaira watched and listened to the situation.

She could hear music, gunfire, and the repetition of coins being bounced back.

And she was pretty sure she knew what was controlling that.

...This is Naito and Naruze’s song...

Of course, the tempo and everything else was too slow when compared to their current movements. The lyrics had only just begun and, given the remaining time, the battle would end before the song even reached the halfway mark.

But the two of them were moving nonetheless.

They were moving according to the song. At least it looked that way to Mitotsudaira.

Why would they do this?

...For cooperation.

And it was not a type of cooperation learned from combat training or

everyday life.

It sounded like a light song, but it still had its foundation in their previous songs.

It was a Technohexen song where one would call out, the other would respond, and then they would sing together.

The familiar division of parts and melody began with the song they could hear and gradually built up speed on top of that.

They would not stop.

They moved in perfect unison.

They called out, responded, and sang together.

They fired, deflected, and fought together.

"Heh heh. What is that? They're not even looking at their opponent," said Kimi. "But that might be what makes them Zwei Fräulein."

Naito and Naruze sang within their great speed.

They had long since left behind the original speed of the song. But Naito fired.

"The bed late at night is so hard and lonely. The accommodation of love approaches a crossroads."

Their song was not voiced. She simply isolated her part of the lyrics and tossed them to her partner.

But as if to catch them, Naruze would bounce back the shot. And...

"I will sing the music of dawn until morning. Everyone calls that a dream."

The coin bullet flew.

Several bullets were already flying back and forth between them.

So the two of them bounced back the incoming bullets all at once.

"Herein kommen."

Naruze used her pen to catch the additional shot coming her way.

“Come on in and bring your heart.”

In response, Naito used a spell to deflect the shot coming her way.

“The wings of arrival. Eisen.”

And they sang.

Naruze thought, *Never a dull moment around here.*

...Honestly!

It was Kimi. That girl was just so hard to deal with.

Just when Naruze had been trying to come up with a way out of this, Kimi had given her a hint.

That hint was the intro to their new song.

...That's right.

That was a form of cooperation separate from their training and everything else.

Their exchange of attacks could be done through an exchange of song.

So they simply had to take turns sending something to the other.

And if they could not afford to make the other one wait, it would be based in an impatient yearning that led to a speedy response.

Naruze wanted to stubbornly insist that it had simply come to her and that Kimi had not clued her in And Naruze sang. Margot did as well.

“Herein kommen.”

The shock of the deflected and fired shots felt good in her right arm.

“Ring the bell and I'll be right there.”

“A hurrying heart. Eisen.”

“Even if you feel like giving up, don't hang your head.”

“Don't decide everything on your own. Raise your hand and look to the sky.”

That's right, thought Naruze.

She was not alone.

“Black and gold wings.”

“White and black Gerade.”

“Twin skies and wings.”

“Morning and night can be bound together.”

She had a partner who would send back her shots. A partner who would take in her power and respond to it.

“Herein kommen.”

“The gift is a secret.”

Yes, agreed Naruze. The lyrics were embarrassing, but this was her part.

So she said it.

“The feelings that mend our love. Eisen.”

It was indeed embarrassing, but then they sang together and recovered that feeling.

“Herein kommen.”

“The gift is for you.”

Margot responded.

“Let’s make our love with your Eisen.”

Asama watched the exchange of attacks and the lyrics scrolling by on the divine transmission.

Marine was pushing forward while also being pushed back.

Her strategy had been to separate the two Technohexen, but...

...They’ve made their separation a natural thing.

Their words could reach each other even while separated.

They could call out and receive a response.

They could receive a call and respond to it.

As those two variants were played out at high speed, the anxiety of separation vanished from their tactics.

Marine had split them up and repeatedly fired on them, but...

“I have six wings. Together we have twelve.”

“The geometric numbers of the Technohexen.”

They took advantage of that and set up an exchange of bullets.

“My *Auspuff* is limited. Together we are unlimited.”

That was true enough.

“The limitless Magie Herrlich.”

Both of them had lost use of one arm, but they were not at a disadvantage.

“Geheimnis Sabbat.”

Their right hand seemed to take the place of the other’s left hand.

They both covered for the deficiencies in the other’s position and movements.

And Naruze looked to Naito.

“I am calling for you, Schwarz.”

Naito returned Naruze’s gaze.

“The gold wings of der Nacht.”

They both deflected a bullet at once.

“Östlich Licht.”

This time, Naito looked to Naruze.

“I am calling for you, Weiss.”

Naruze clearly nodded at the lyrics. And with a smile...

“The black wings of der Morgen.”

Their attacks coincided.

Instead of taking turns, they bounced back bullets at the exact same moment, producing a song of complete unison that made even the word “cooperation” meaningless.

“Herein kommen. Let us spread all our wings and sing our love, your Eisen.”

“Herein kommen. Let us send forth the twin wings and sing our love.”

They accelerated.

“Zwei Fräulein.”

Marine endured.

She was on the port side. The Schwarz Hexen was moving to port in order to assist the injured Weiss Hexen.

Marine accelerated toward them, changed direction, and blasted gravel. But...

...They can fight back!?

The enemy was positioned at equal distances on either side of her.

But it was the opposite of before.

She had not split them up.

The enemy had her surrounded.

This tactic would normally be unthinkable because it would lead to friendly fire.

But the black and white Technohexen could reflect and guide their shots, so it was possible for them. And...

“This music...”

They sang in their hearts a sped-up version of the music she heard.

The song controlled them like an incantation, but it was not the kind of Technohexen song heard in Europe.

She did not recognize the song. And as it sped up...

...What is this?

I'm being swallowed up, she concluded.

The music swelled like a large crowd. Marine realized that the current had the pattern of an uncontrollably stormy sea and was meant to surround her and sink her. After all...

"They aren't even looking at me anymore...!"

This was what it meant to swallow someone up.

They looked away from her, took her into themselves, and left her there.

From there, she would be digested and suddenly find she had been sunk down to defeat.

This was the same as before.

The things she could not control were pushing her toward defeat and driving her out. So...

"...!"

Marine moved toward victory.

There was a way. Specifically...

"Ten more seconds!" announced the Asama Shrine Representative.

Only ten seconds left.

"Ohh...!"

Marine used that time to accelerate all at once.

She charged into the center of the shrine grounds to escape from between her two opponents.

If she could escape them for ten seconds, she would win. But...

"_____"

The Technohexen were coming.

"9."

The Asama Shrine Representative's voice rang through the air.

Marine saw that the Technohexen had abandoned their previous exchange and were pursuing her with the acceleration of their brooms.

The white and black pair held their brooms with their right arms and maintained their position on either side of Marine.

But while they had changed position, they had not fired bullets yet. The entirety of their previous exchange had collided with the port side barrier, producing a loud and solid sound.

“8.”

Marine moved before the Technohexen could raise their brooms to fire or switch to their pen.

“7.”

She fired on the two of them.

She fired at the black one’s feet and the white one’s face. And with that...

...I will win!

If they would pursue even when she dodged, she would have to fire. That was what this was. However...

“6.”

Marine saw that the white and black Technohexen did not use their brooms and guns or prepare their pen.

They instead directed their brooms toward her.

“5.”

The white and black intersected to avoid the bullets Marine had fired at their head or feet.

The black went up and the white down. The white flew fore and the black flew aft where the main shrine was.

Unlike their previous intersection, they were taking each other’s position. And...

“4.”

The Schwarz Hexen twisted her body in midair.

She made a half rotation to flip upside down.

Marine saw her produce a firing acceleration spell in her hand.

That was normally used as her broom's gun barrel. When used on its own, she could not specify a direction and the bullet could fly in any direction.

It would be dangerous if she got her broom up with that.

So Marine fired.

And just then...

"3."

The Schwarz Hexen fired several coin bullets while dodging below Marine's bullet.

She fired directly from the acceleration spell in her hand.

Since she could not specify a direction, the coin bullets burst uncontrollably out of it.

Marine saw some of the silver color fly up and to the right and some of it fly down and to the left.

It was a failed attack.

It was obvious the girl had not had time to prepare her broom.

But Marine had to wonder why she had done this.

Was it simply a final desperate attempt as the timer ran out?

Or...

"2."

Marine heard the Weiss Hexen's voice from behind her.

"Herrlich!!"

That was the sign of a Technohexen completing her spell.

However, Marine had not heard the Weiss Hexen prepare her pen after flying behind her.

Marine's shot should have kept her off balance. So...

...It can't be...

"1."

Marine saw a white curve appear between her and the Schwarz Hexen.

It was a guideline.

But it was not alone. Countless tracks appeared like lines meant to represent the wind.

...This...

She recognized it. At the beginning of the battle when she had driven the Weiss Hexen to the main shrine, that girl had drawn several of these lines. That had partially been because she had not had time to load any bullets and could not use them, but...

"Was it to guide me here!?"

It was for this final instant.

This spell created a surprise attack when Marine could not dodge in time.

And they had picked up all of the Schwarz Hexen's stray shots.

...!

Marine began her evasive action. She raised her thrusters.

"0."

And she received a direct hit.

It's over, realized Asama as she opened the combat barrier.

No one inside remained standing.

Naruze and Naito had fallen to their knees and then sat down, facing each other.

"...Ha."

With weak smiles, they raised their clenched right fists to reassure each other.

And Marine lay collapsed in the center of the shrine grounds.

She lay on her back despite how that could damage her wings.

“Kh...”

Her right hand covered her face as she wept.

She had had her own reasons for this battle and this was the result. Asama stepped inside and spoke.

“If you need anything, the Asama Shrine will help you out, so I look forward to working with you.”

The woman did not acknowledge her. But Naruze sighed, and...

“I’ll contact Almirante, okay?”

Marine still did not respond, but she did move.

She sat up, took a deep breath, and stood up.

She brushed the gravel off of her clothing and equipment.

“I am leaving,” she said weakly.

“No, you aren’t,” announced Asama.

Naito looked back at that.

“Are you going to heal her?”

“No.” Asama shook her head. “You made a mess of the shrine’s grounds. All three of you need to level out the gravel. And do it properly; you’re in the presence of a god. You can’t leave until that is done.”

Marine glared at her, but Asama had no idea what she had said wrong.

Asama clapped once and said one last thing.

“That concludes the battle.”

Final Chapter: Those who Look Up at the Normal World

最終章

『常世の振り仰ぎ人』



気づいてみれば
先に行く友人を
羨ましがる自分がいる
配点（私の望むもの）



All of a sudden

I found I was jealous

Of the friends who had gone on ahead

Point Allocation (What I Want)

“Ha ha,” laughed a man high in the night.

He was above a derrick mast on Takao.

The man, Almirante, sat in the seat of a small flying boat and he was laughing with a sign frame next to him.

“So after having you clean up the grounds, she healed you and let you leave? Sounds like a fun tour of the Asama Shrine, Marine.”

“This wasn’t some sports match... Oh, I broke my right collarbone. Will I get injury pay for that?”

“The ranks are related to the jobs we’re allotted, so you’ve got a decent argument. I’ll arrange it with the guild.”

Almirante viewed the nightscape of Musashi as the night wind washed over him. And he leaned back in his seat.

“If anything happened, I was thinking of picking you up like old times.”

“I am capable of some change, you know?” said Marine. “Then again, now I’m Rank 3.”

“So Zwei Fräulein is Rank 2. And that might change again pretty soon.”

“...Are you saying they will defeat Wild Kamelie?”

“You intended to defeat her too, didn’t you?”

After a while, she replied with a “judge”. And...

“Almirante, why didn’t you ever demand a rematch with them?”

“...Listen, Marine.”

“What is it?”

"When you get older, you find you're capable of doing a lot of things separate from experience."

Such as...

"You can say you're the strongest and not really care even if you lose."

He laughed after that.

"Almirante..."

There was clear annoyance in Marine's voice, but he only quieted his laughter a bit.

"Ha ha. It's all about experience. But, Marine, you can't trust yourself in anything that doesn't come from experience. ...Neither can Zwei Fräulein."

"Can you gain confidence from something other than experience?"

"Confidence means trusting in yourself. And if you can't do that, then you rely on experience."

Listen.

"Skill is necessary. But in the end, trusting in yourself means to ignore that and take the plunge at some point. Oh, and this is a lecture."

"Do you think Zwei Fräulein has that?"

"That's what Technohexen are," said Almirante while erasing the smile from his face. "They were driven from their homes, had their families hunted, lost all their rights, and even had the law turn on them. The Technohexen hunts born from the inquisition reach their peak in the 15th century. Do you know what that means?"

"...For Technohexen, their defeat is predetermined?"

"They started here after losing everything. So if there are some idiots that decide to aim higher from that situation, then I'm sure they'll just keep gaining more experience and confidence."

But...

"The same can be said of their predecessor, Wild Kamelie."

"Then I..."

"With Tres España, the development race, and me, you had your share of issues. Other things kept forcing more and more defeat onto you."

Almirante moved the flying boat as he spoke. He had it float up and enter a descending route.

And he said more to Marine.

"But you've finally earned a defeat all your own."

"-----"

"...Marine, go get something to eat. Orange's place should be open. I know you haven't had our home cuisine in a while, but at this point, we should call it foreign cuisine. Look at it like that as you start eating it again. After all...from now on, you're starting with what you've lost."

Now.

"I'll be by to pick you up, so open a window. Hop onto the luggage space like you failed to do out the ship's window way back when. Nowadays, I'm sure you can pull it off."

Naito sat on the stairs in front of the main shrine and looked at her left hand.

It was wrapped with a bandage woven with Shinto spell charms, so it looked like her hand had grown a few sizes.

"Now I've done it..."

"That's not the one you use to play, so it's not that bad."

That response came from Naruze who was next to the stairs pulling guitar cases from the pile of instruments, opening them, and checking on the contents.

"I broke my collarbone and dislocated the shoulder, so I won't be able to hold an instrument for a while. I probably won't be able to practice until after the Spring School Festival begins."

"We'll have to practice the singing and stage movements until then."

"Asama said she would be purifying us and doing an official healing, but how fancy is that gonna be?"

She thought it was weird for Technohexen to rely on Shinto, but...

"An official healing by the Asama Shrine will be stronger than anything we could do. I want to be healed in time for the Gagaku Festival, so we should probably do as Asama-chi says."

Naito thought as she said that.

...It might be good to have this chance to let ourselves cool down.

A lot had happened recently and she had both hesitated and overheated.

But until they could actually practice...

"Maybe we should calm down some."

"I doubt we'll have the chance. Not with Wild Kamelie out there. ...She's sure to want a match during the Spring School Festival."

"Really?"

"The tester application date happens to fall on the first day."

"Wow." Naito spread her mouth horizontally. "If we get injured there, we'll be in real trouble for the Gagaku Festival."

"There's always next year."

It was scary how Naruze could smile like that.

"Are you assuming we're going to get injured in that match?"

"No. But it might happen if we're unlucky. And I'm not giving up on the Gagaku Festival. I intend to perform and outdo everyone else there."

Naito glanced over at Naruze's smile.

...Yes.

Why was it? She realized something when looking at Naruze. Not only was the girl excited, but...

"Ga-chan, have you gained more confidence?"

"Who knows. I do know I would've gotten pretty down if we'd lost," she said.
"But I am happy to know we can reach for greater heights."

"...Can we?"

"We can. If we're together we can. I think I can believe that now."

She seemed to be asking "how about you?", so Naito smiled a little.

"That's right."

She held her right hand forward and descended the steps.

They faced each other and lightly swung their right hands toward each other.

"After all, we are Zwei Fräulein."

They did not need any titles such as "dragon slayer".

They were Zwei Fräulein.

"Judge."

Naito and Naruze bumped their right fists together.

The solid sound rang through the shrine grounds.

Asama went out to call for Naito and Naruze.

They had prepared a quick celebration party in Asama's room of the Asama Shrine's main building.

The cooking was complete, so she had planned on calling them in, and purifying them in the spring since they had to change clothes anyway, but...

"Naito? Naruze? You've checked out the instruments now, right? So if you're going to be purified..."

She saw the two of them curled up and facing each other.

"...Wh-what are you two doing?"

After asking, she realized they were both holding their left shoulder or left arm.

"Ga-chan, th-that touch vibrated pretty painfully through us, didn't it?"

"Y-yes. It really got my shoulder. It's still too soon to get carried away."

Asama did not really understand, but they had apparently screwed up somehow.

But then they got up and looked to her.

"Hey, Asama. Once we take a break and get something to eat and drink...do you want to hear our new song for the Gagaku Festival?"

Asama thought while nodding at Naruze's question and expression.

...She looks really refreshed.

Asama had her own things to think about and had spent her days doing that, but those two were likely the same.

Kimi and Mitotsudaira walked up behind her.

Kimi was wearing an apron after helping out and she smiled a little when she saw that pair.

"Oh, they seem to be doing well. But, you two? Based on what I saw today, are you still missing a new song for the Gagaku Festival?"

"Since we're injured and can't practice, this might be our chance to write it," said Naito as she looked up into the sky.

Oh, thought Asama.

"How do you write songs?"

She was curious how other people did what they were about to do.

Naito smiled as she responded to the question.

"We generally do it while chatting away. I hope we can continue to exchange information and methods like this."

"That's right," said Naruze with a nod.

That girl could be more conservative, so that meant she was allowing them to intervene in her sensibilities. Asama found that somewhat surprising, but...

...No, this is probably just one of the "usual" things that Naruze has.

Before, those two had referred to her as one of their own.

That must not have been a temporary thing.

Naruze once more used that phrase.

"We consider each other one of our own, so I'd like to discuss what we're doing for the Gagaku Festival, how we show off our songs, and plenty of other things too. But," she said, "those discussions are probably going to be more positive now, so...I'm glad we won. Now we can look a little higher from now on."

Asama thought about the phrase "look a little higher".

...Is she saying she wants to keep doing that forever?

With that question in her heart, Asama asked the two of them a question. If they were going to keep looking higher...

"Is that the kind of 'usual' you two want?"

Asama saw Naito nod in response.

"We have wings and we can fly, so moving higher is really important."

That meant they had made up their minds.

With this battle, they had taken at least one step forward in their idea of the "usual".

Asama looked to the two Technohexen.

Naito spread her wings to see how her body was doing, but her six wings were not harmed. To prove it, she gave a light flap.

"We'll probably have a fight with a pretty major opponent after a short break, but you don't have to worry about us. Even if we're beaten up and looking down, we'll be flying again before you know it."

"Hee hee. You say that, Margot, but I tend to get down and stay down when I lose, so you'll have to pull me back up if that happens. But...what about you, Asama? Can you look higher?"

"Good question..."

Asama thought about it. As far as Musashi's Shinto was concerned, the only person higher than her was her father.

But if she did not focus on that kind of rank and hierarchy...

...If I'm changing in a good way and moving "higher" day by day...

Naito and Naruze moved out ahead of me, she realized before answering.

"Yes. ...I hope I too can look higher in my own way."

Everyone but Kimi opened their mouth at that.

"Ohh..."

"Wh-what was that for!?"

"Heh heh. You've been viewing each other through a certain framework without realizing it." Kimi removed her apron with a smile. "And festivals are best for breaking free of that kind of framework. You expect to see surprising sides of people there."

"Then if I work at it and surprise some people, I win, right?"

"Heh heh. ...Who is it you want to surprise?"

"Eh?"

Asama immediately thought of him.

He had guided her to start this band, so would he be surprised to see her on the stage? Or would that be exactly what he expected?

...The hurdle is a lot higher if I want to surprise him...

He was an entertainer. It would take a lot to surprise him.

But, she thought. Naito and Naruze overcame one of their hurdles today.

Everyone else probably had something like this, too.

"Then," said Asama without forgetting that enjoying this herself was the most important part. "I hope I can surprise everyone by surpassing their expectations."

She hoped they could have fun and celebrate at the Gagaku Festival. They were about to undergo purification and hold a quick party, but that would be

enough of a divergence from their “usual” life.

“What do you want to do?” Asama opened a sign frame and asked Naito and Naruze this question. “Do you want me to inform the rest of the girls in the class what happened?”



——私達は無敵よ。

“They’ll find out soon enough even if you don’t, so you might as well.”

Naruze averted her gaze, but she did not forbid it. Asama found that kind of amusing as she wrote up the divine mail.

And she asked another question that occurred to her.

“Should I inform Toori-kun as well?”

After all...

“He might bring a celebratory tart to school tomorrow.”

—**We are unbeatable.**

Afterword

With that, I deliver Kimitoasamade 3-B to you all. I feel like the page numbers grew a fair bit, but that just seems to happen sometimes, so whatever. It makes things more interesting.

This time, everyone was preparing for the Spring School Festival and Gagaku Festival, Naito and Naruze began to move, and some other movements began. More and more, you're able to see their shape and their connections to others during this formative period before the main story begins.

While writing the main story and this, I got to thinking about how everyone has their own process for decision making and you can see their individuality in what they place more weight on. Some people will start on it right away, some will think about the best way of doing it while they start, and some will decide to start but then search for something to give them that final push to get moving. It seems to me like a lot of people end up wandering even within their decision.

To go further, this seems like something you decide on just once in life, but it's generally something you repeatedly and continually do day by day.

That's where you choose what you want to go "higher" in or what you want to be "different", but I think you gain the most if you choose to head down that path as far as possible and change your everyday life as much as possible.

Asama, Masazumi, Naito, Naruze, and the others are figuring all that out, realizing they can do things they never expected, feeling surprise at the unexpected sides of others, and either rediscovering or confirming those things. I kind of wish I had written these things in the main story.

Anyway, now for the chat, starting with the other person this time.

"Oh, yeah. When I was cleaning, I found a PC-98 porn game in my storeroom."

“What have you been hoarding in your storeroom?”

“Anyway, my 98 UV was in the closet, so I pulled it out and it actually still worked.”

“My 68 works too. Computers from back then really were sturdy.”

“Right, right. It had been so long, so I booted it up and was shocked to find how much my tastes had changed. I used to like short hair... Oh, but my love of green hair remains unchanged.”

“That information is completely and utterly useless to me.”

I'll take that to mean people really can change.

And with that, my background music was the expected Eisen: Commercial Song by Eisen. I feel like you can see a lot of their everyday life in that performance.

Anyway, the question this time was, “Who put in the most effort?”

Now, wait just a bit for 4-A.

September 2012. An early September morning.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ The katakana spelling of Anagni is almost the same as the Japanese term for anal masturbation.